

FINAL REPORT

**HEALING THROUGH ARTS: INTEGRATING STORY
RETELLING FROM SONGS IN ART THERAPY**

Submitted to English Letters Study Program of Universitas Ma Chung
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Undergraduate Degree of
English Letters



By

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LEMBAR PERSETUJUAN PEMBIMBING SKRIPSI

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UNTUK MENCAPAI GELAR SARJANA SASTRA BAHASA INGGRIS**

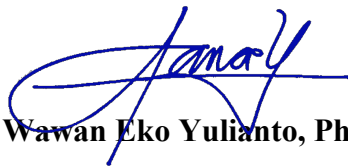
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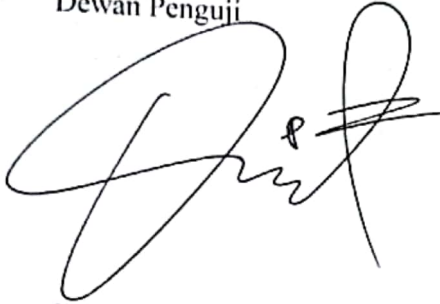
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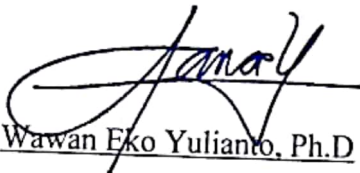
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PERNYATAAN KEASLIAN KARYA

“Dengan ini saya menyatakan bahwa Laporan Tugas Akhir dengan judul *Healing Through Arts: Integrating Story Retelling from Songs in Art Therapy for Mental Issues* ini beserta seluruh isinya adalah benar-benar karya saya sendiri, dan saya tidak melakukan penjiplakan atau pengutipan dengan cara-cara yang tidak sesuai dengan etika keilmuan yang berlaku dalam masyarakat keilmuan. Atas pernyataan ini, saya siap menanggung resiko / sanksi yang dijatuhkan kepada saya apabila kemudian ditemukan adanya pelanggaran terhadap etika keilmuan dalam karya saya ini, atau ada klaim dari pihak lain terhadap keaslian karya saya ini.”

Madiun, 19 Agustus 2024

Yang membuat pernyataan.



Kartika Ramadhany Rachmah

ABSTRACT

Healing Through Arts: Integrating Story Retelling from Songs in Art Therapy

(August 2024)

Kartika Ramadhany Rachmah., Universitas Ma Chung;

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This creative project explores the innovative integration of story retelling from songs into art therapy as a means of addressing mental health issues. Grounded in the theories of Expressive Arts Therapy, Narrative Therapy, and Music Therapy, the study emphasises the therapeutic potential of using songs to evoke emotions and personal narratives. The report on this creative writing project focuses on the Indonesian context, where mental health issues are often stigmatised and inadequately addressed. By combining the emotional resonance of music with the expressive capabilities of art, this approach aims to provide a culturally relevant and accessible form of therapy. This project also features a series of short stories that illustrate the healing journey of individuals coping with mental illness, highlighting the role of creativity in fostering psychological well-being. This study seeks to demonstrate that integrating music and art therapy can enhance emotional expression, promote self-discovery, and facilitate deeper connections with one's cultural identity, ultimately contributing to a more holistic approach to mental health treatment.

Key Words: *narrative, mental health, art therapy, story retelling*

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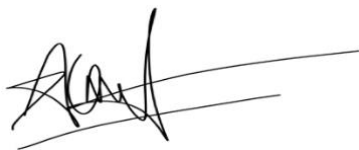
First, I want to thank God for giving me the blessings, mercy, and guidance so that I could complete the final report entitled *Healing Through Arts: Integrating Story Retelling from Songs in Art Therapy for Mental Issues*.

To my academic advisors, examiners, also all of the lecturers in the English Letters Study Program of Universitas Ma Chung, who have provided supports during my time of study here, I sincerely want to thank you for all the lessons you gave to me. I am especially grateful to Lilis Lestari Wilujeng, S.S., M.Hum, and Wawan Eko Yulianto, Ph.D, who served as my project advisors, as well as Ounu Zakiy Sukaton, S.Hum., MGAL who fulfilled the role of being my project examiner, I'd like to say thank you for the guidance you gave during all the online mentoring sessions.

To my late father, my mom, my brother, my sister-in-law and niece, who always pray for me and reminding me to thank God in all of my life journey, I would sent my gratitude to them all.

And finally, I would like to thank all those who helped me finish the final report. Hopefully, this internship report will be useful especially for me and for readers. You guys are the best!

Madiun, August 19th 2024

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kartika', with several horizontal lines extending to the right.

Kartika Ramadhany Rachmah

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Mental health problems have been around for so long, but nowadays, it has become one of the most serious problems in the world. If our mental health deteriorates consistently after some event, it can be considered a mental illness, and that is not entirely wrong. Mental illness itself is one of the causes why mental health is important for people. It is also can be called a mental disorder. American Psychiatric Association describes mental illness as health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking or behaviour, or maybe a combination of these three. It can be associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities.

Ghebreyesus (in World Mental Health Report 2022) said that mental health is a lot more than the absence of illness: it is an intrinsic part of our individual and collective health and well-being. This shows that mental illness is as important as the physical illness. Not only that, if you are diagnosed with some serious physical illness, and then after that you are also diagnosed with serious mental illness, that will deteriorate your well-being health more than it should be.

Mental health is an important part of a complete state of health. This means that mental health is important not only to the self but also to determine whether someone is healthy or not. This can also mean that mental health

treatment is supposed to be provided in primary health care, not only in the mental asylum or any mental health care centre.

Data from Riset Kesehatan Dasar (Riskesdas) 2018 shows that the prevalence of a household with someone who suffered from mental issues increased by 7% in five years (roughly from 2013-2015). In Indonesia, people who are diagnosed with any mental problems are not taken to a doctor or psychiatrist. Instead of doing that, around 14% of people here still do the 'pasung' practice (confinement practice), which then refrains the mentally ill from going anywhere and refrains them from hurting other people.

Not only that, data from Riskesdas also shows that 6,1% among Indonesians aged ≥ 15 years old are prone to depression, and only 9% of them went to seek professional mental health services. These data show that mental health issues remain a significantly under-addressed issue. The stigma surrounding mental health, coupled with limited access to mental health services, exacerbates the challenges faced by those affected. This situation underscores the need for therapeutic interventions that are both effective and culturally resonant.

According to the mental health data (Riskesdas, 2018) around 15.1% of people who suffer from schizophrenia does not receive any treatment. Although 84.9% of people who suffer from schizophrenia receive treatment, but from this number, only 48.9% of them are still taking their medicine regularly. What about the other 51.1% who are not taking their medicine regularly? There are various reasons why they are not taking their medicine

regularly. Some are feeling that the dosage given aren't suitable for them, some people states that the medicine is not available in their nearest pharmacy, and even some are stating that they can not afford the medicines. Some people feel they are mentally healthy enough not to take any medicines and some are worried about the side effects of the medicines. Riskesdas also shows the prevalence of people aged ≥ 15 years old getting mental-emotional disorders increases by 3.8% in five years, resulting in 9.8% of Indonesians being prone to getting mental-emotional disorders.

Those data from Riskesdas (2018) highlight significant gaps in the treatment of schizophrenia and mental-emotional disorders in Indonesia. Although a majority of people with schizophrenia receive some form of treatment, nearly half are not taking their medication regularly due to various barriers, including issues with medication availability, affordability, and concerns about side effects. Additionally, the rising prevalence of mental-emotional disorders among individuals aged 15 and older underscores the growing mental health crisis in the country. These findings indicate an urgent need for improved access to mental health care, better management of treatment adherence, and greater public awareness to address the challenges faced by those suffering from mental health issues.

Songs have long been a powerful medium for storytelling, encapsulating emotions, experiences, and cultural narratives. Through lyrics and melodies, songs convey complex emotions and stories that resonate deeply with listeners. The process of retelling these stories, especially through creative

expression, can provide therapeutic benefits by helping individuals process their emotions, explore their identities, and gain new insights into their experiences.

One treatment method for mental illness is Art Therapy, which utilises the creative process to improve mental health and emotional well-being (McNiff, 1992). Art therapy offers a nonverbal outlet for expressing thoughts and feelings, making it particularly useful for individuals who may find it difficult to articulate their emotions. Art therapy encourages self-expression, reduces stress, and promotes self-discovery. Art therapy facilitates emotional healing and resilience building by providing a safe space for individuals to explore their inner worlds.

Songs play a significant role in shaping cultural identity and personal narratives. They reflect societal values, historical events, and personal experiences, making them a rich source of material for therapeutic work. The lyrics of songs often address themes of love, loss, struggle, and triumph, which can resonate with listeners on a deep emotional level. Practitioners can tap into this emotional resonance by incorporating songs into art therapy and facilitate a deeper connection with people with mental issues.

Living with mental illness itself can make you feel like you are in a nightmare. This is because you will constantly feel like you're not good enough to live, and it feels like you are not good enough to live in this world. This kind of feeling can be felt whenever you are alone, without any accompaniment from, say, your friends and family. In this matter, your friends and your family

(also probably the caretaker or helper, and your whole surroundings) may play a significant role in the recovery of the one affected by mental illness.

Given the high prevalence of mental health issues and the cultural context of Indonesia, there is a pressing need for innovative therapeutic approaches that are both effective and culturally resonant. Traditional mental health services are often insufficient, and there is a growing recognition of the value of alternative therapies that incorporate elements of culture and creativity. Integrating story retelling from songs with art therapy creates a holistic approach to mental health treatment. This combined methodology leverages narrative and creative expression's therapeutic benefits, offering a comprehensive healing framework.

Mental health is important because it contributes to our decision-making process, how we cope with our stress, and how we can relate to others. It's a vital part of your life, and it can impact your thoughts, behaviours and emotions. Being healthy, physically or mentally, can promote productivity and effectiveness in work, school or caregiving activities. It plays an important part in the health of our relationships with others, not just romantically. Still, our relationships, in general, will allow us to adapt to any changes in our lives and cope with adversity.

1.2. Project Objectives

This creative project proposes an integrated therapeutic approach that combines songs' narrative power with art therapy's expressive potential. Individuals can externalise their internal struggles by engaging in story

retelling through artistic creation, reframe their experiences, and derive new meanings. This process fosters emotional healing and reconnects individuals with their cultural roots and personal identities, reinforcing a sense of belonging and self-worth. By harnessing the power of songs and art, this creative thesis aims to demonstrate that healing can be achieved through culturally meaningful and expressive forms of therapy. Ultimately, it seeks to foster a greater understanding of mental health and promote the well-being of individuals and communities in Indonesia.

This creative project also aims to make the reader aware that people with mental illness also deserved to be treated as decent human beings. Being aware of the people who have mental illness can help. Because when you are aware of their mental illness, you can remind them about their purpose in life, and you can also cheer them up without actually hurting and/or triggering them. By reading the short story, readers will know some of the struggles people with undiagnosed mental illness that lives among people have to go through so that later, the reader will know that mental illness is not something to be embarrassed or ashamed about. Then, they can slowly break the bad prejudice about mentally ill people.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

2.1. Theoretical Framework

2.1.1. Expressive Art Therapy

The egalitarian and inclusive spirit of expressive arts therapy is guided by the assumption that every person can participate in making art. This is what defines and differentiates it from other approaches to artistic expression. Expressive arts therapy has even used the challenges presented by different skill levels as the basis for showing how facility with particular media can sometimes interfere with authentic and new expressions (McNiff, 2017).

Expressive Arts Therapy, pioneered by McNiff in the 1970s and expanded by Rogers, emerged as a vital component of the humanistic psychology movement. This movement, which arose in response to the limitations of psychoanalysis and behaviorism, emphasises individual potential, self-actualisation, and the importance of free will. Humanistic psychology posits that every person has an inherent ability to grow, heal, and achieve personal fulfilment. It is within this framework that Expressive Arts Therapy finds its roots.

McNiff's work laid the foundational principles of this therapeutic approach, emphasising the importance of the creative process in fostering psychological well-being. Rogers, building on her father's person-centered therapy, further developed these ideas, integrating her

understanding of humanistic principles with a deep appreciation for the arts.

Expressive Arts Therapy has found applications in a wide range of settings, including mental health clinics, hospitals, schools, and community centers. It has been particularly effective in working with individuals who have experienced trauma, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. By engaging in creative activities, people with mental issues can access and process emotions, develop coping strategies, and foster a sense of empowerment and self-awareness.

Expressive Arts Therapy, with its roots in humanistic psychology, offers a comprehensive framework for integrating story retelling from songs into art therapy. Its emphasis on intermodal expression, the creative process, and non-verbal communication makes it uniquely suited to addressing the complex needs of individuals with mental health issues. By leveraging the therapeutic potential of music and art, this approach can provide a powerful, multi-sensory platform for healing and personal growth.

2.1.2. Narrative Therapy

Narrative Therapy, developed by White and Epston, is based on the idea that individuals construct meaning through their life stories. A narrative psychotherapeutic approach (White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990) is founded on the notion that a person constructs narratives in order

to describe themselves and to provide sense and meaning to their lived experiences and life events.

This therapeutic approach helps to reframe personal narratives more empoweringly. By focusing on the re-authoring of stories, narrative therapy enables us to shift their perspectives and identify alternative, more positive narratives. This theory underpins song-based storytelling in this project, where we reinterpret and express our feelings through music, fostering a deeper connection to their emotions and promoting psychological healing.

Narrative Therapy has been effectively applied in various therapeutic contexts, including individual, couple, family, and community therapy. It is particularly useful for people dealing with issues such as trauma, grief, anxiety, depression, and relationship problems. By helping them to reframe their stories, Narrative Therapy empowers them to gain a sense of agency and control over their lives (Botha, 2021).

In the context of integrating song-based storytelling into art therapy, Narrative Therapy offers a valuable framework for using music to facilitate emotional expression and psychological healing.

Narrative Therapy, with its emphasis on the power of stories in shaping reality, offers a robust framework for integrating song-based storytelling into art therapy. By re-authoring their narratives through music, people with mental issues can gain new insights, express their

emotions, and develop more empowering perspectives on their lives. This approach leverages the therapeutic potential of music and art, providing a comprehensive and multifaceted platform for healing and personal growth.

2.1.3. Theories of Music and Art Therapy

Music Therapy is a well-established therapeutic approach that utilises music as a means to address various emotional, cognitive, and social needs (Wheeler, 2015). It has roots in ancient practices but has developed significantly as a formal therapeutic discipline over the past century. Early pioneers such as Bruscia and Wheeler have made significant contributions to the field, providing frameworks and methodologies that highlight the unique power of music in therapy.

Bruscia's extensive work on defining and refining the practice of music therapy emphasises the importance of music in facilitating therapeutic processes. He has developed comprehensive models that integrate both musical and psychological elements to promote healing. Wheeler, through her research and clinical work, has further explored the therapeutic potentials of music, particularly its ability to evoke emotions and memories, thus deepening the therapeutic engagement.

Music Therapy has been successfully applied in various settings, including hospitals, schools, mental health clinics, and community centers. It is effective for a wide range of conditions, including anxiety, depression, trauma, neurological disorders, and developmental

disabilities. By leveraging the emotional and cognitive benefits of music, therapists can help people with mental illness to achieve therapeutic goals more effectively.

In the context of integrating song-based storytelling into art therapy, Music Therapy provides a robust framework for using music to facilitate emotional expression and psychological healing.

Music Therapy, with its emphasis on the emotional, cognitive, and social benefits of music, offers a powerful framework for integrating song-based storytelling into art therapy. By combining music with art and narrative techniques, therapists can create a comprehensive and multifaceted approach that addresses the needs of the whole person. This approach leverages the strengths of each discipline, providing a rich and engaging platform for healing and personal growth.

2.1.4. Mental Illness Caused by Childhood Trauma

Epidemiologic studies indicate that children exposed to early adverse experiences are at increased risk for the development of depression, anxiety disorders, or both (Heim, 2001). These experiences, often referred to as childhood trauma, can have a lasting impact on mental health, leading to a higher likelihood of developing psychiatric conditions in later life. The exact mechanisms linking early adversity to mental illness are complex and multifaceted, involving factors such as neurobiological changes, disruptions in attachment and relationships, and maladaptive coping strategies. These insights underscore the

importance of early intervention and supportive care for at-risk populations to mitigate the long-term effects of childhood trauma on mental health.

Childhood maltreatment is a key environmental risk factor, inducing vulnerability to develop new and recurrent depressive and comorbid anxiety and depressive episodes (Hovens, 2015). This vulnerability stems from the profound impact of early trauma on psychological and biological systems. It can disrupt the development of emotional regulation and stress-response systems, leading to heightened sensitivity to stress and a predisposition to mental health issues. Addressing and mitigating the effects of childhood maltreatment is crucial in preventing the onset and recurrence of these disorders.

Children who are exposed to sexual or physical abuse or the death of a parent are at higher risk for development of depressive and anxiety disorders later in life (Nemeroff, 2004). This increased risk is linked to the traumatic impact of such experiences, which can disrupt normal emotional and psychological development. The chronic stress associated with early trauma can lead to long-lasting changes in brain function and stress response, making individuals more susceptible to mental health disorders. Early intervention and supportive care are essential to mitigate these long-term effects.

2.2. Formal Framework

2.2.1. Integration of Art Forms

Art therapy is a group of counselling disciplines that combine the fields of fine arts and psychology (Malchiodi, 2005; Brett and McHarg, 2011). Art therapy, dance/movement therapy, drama therapy, music therapy, and poetry therapy are mental health professions that use their discipline-specific art form as a therapeutic tool (ADMP, 2003; BAAT, 2011; BADTH, 2011; BAMT, 2012; AMTA, 2013; NAPT, 2013). Sometimes 'expressive therapies' or 'creative arts therapies' are used as umbrella terms to describe collective disciplines, associations, or tracks within degree programmes (NCCATA, 2013).

The formal framework of this thesis involves the structured integration of multiple art forms, as advocated by Expressive Arts Therapy. This includes creating narrative art inspired by song lyrics and using songs as prompts for storytelling. By engaging ourselves in various creative modalities, we aim to enhance their emotional and cognitive engagement, providing a richer therapeutic experience.

The integration of multiple art forms within the framework of Expressive Arts Therapy provides a dynamic and effective approach to therapy. By engaging people in various creative modalities, we aim to enhance their emotional and cognitive engagement, offering a richer and more holistic therapeutic experience. This intermodal approach not only facilitates emotional expression and processing but also promotes

cognitive stimulation and social connection, leading to comprehensive psychological healing and growth.

2.2.2. Story Retelling Techniques

Denborough (2014) emphasizes the importance of narrative therapy in helping individuals reshape their experiences by retelling their stories. From re-authoring chosen narratives, people can gain new perspectives and draw inspiration to overcome challenges, as "the stories we tell about our lives are not simply reflections of our experiences; they actually shape and influence our experiences" (p. 24).

Building on the principles of Narrative Therapy, our approach involves structured techniques for story retelling through songs. This includes identifying key themes in personal narratives, selecting relevant songs that resonate with these themes, and facilitating creative activities that will allow us to reinterpret and express the song's stories. This process helps to construct more empowering narratives, fostering psychological healing and growth.

The structured integration of story retelling techniques through songs, based on the principles of Narrative Therapy, provides a powerful approach for fostering psychological healing and growth. By identifying key themes, selecting relevant songs, and engaging in creative activities, people can reinterpret and express their personal narratives in empowering ways. This process not only facilitates emotional catharsis and cognitive clarity but also promotes a deeper connection to their

emotions and experiences, leading to holistic healing and personal transformation.

2.2.3. Therapeutic Use of Music

Neuroscientific and clinical studies of music over the past two decades have substantially increased our understanding of its use as a means of therapy. Neuroscientific studies have shown music to be an agent capable of influencing complex neurobiological processes in the brain and suggest that it can potentially play an important role in treatment. Clinical studies provide some evidence that music therapy can be used as an alternative therapy in treating depression, autism, schizophrenia, and dementia, as well as problems of agitation, anxiety, sleeplessness, and substance misuse, though whether it can actually replace other modes of treatment remains undetermined. (Lin, S.T., et al., 2011)

The use of music in therapy, guided by the principles of Music Therapy, involves selecting and integrating songs that evoke specific emotions and memories. This approach helps us to access and process deep-seated emotions, facilitating emotional release and psychological integration. By combining music therapy with art therapy and narrative techniques, we aim to create a multifaceted therapeutic approach that addresses the complex needs of mental health issues.

The therapeutic use of music, integrated with art therapy and narrative techniques, provides a multifaceted approach to addressing

mental health issues. By selecting and integrating songs that evoke specific emotions and memories, people with mental issues can access and process deep-seated emotions, facilitating emotional release and psychological integration. This holistic approach not only enhances emotional expression and cognitive processing but also fosters social connection and personal growth, leading to comprehensive psychological healing.

2.2.4. Naturalism Genre: Focus on Slice of Life

Slice of life is a depiction of mundane experiences in art and entertainment (Jewell, 2001). In theater, slice of life refers to naturalism, while in literary parlance it is a narrative technique in which a seemingly arbitrary sequence of events in a character's life is presented, often lacking plot development, conflict, and exposition, as well as having an open ending.

Naturalism is a literary genre that aims to depict everyday activities and experiences as they are in real life. It seeks to represent familiar and mundane aspects of existence without idealization or romanticism. A subset of naturalism, Slice of Life, focuses on the depiction of ordinary, everyday experiences, often highlighting the beauty and complexity found in mundane activities.

Naturalism involves a detailed, unembellished portrayal of everyday life, with characters that are depicted with depth, exhibiting a range of emotions and personal growth. As naturalism often explores

societal issues, reflecting time and place in which they are set, they also explores the subtle emotional and psychological changes in the characters. Naturalism also uses a minimalist approach to storytelling, to highlight the beauty in simplicity.

Both naturalism and slice of life offer insight into the cultural and societal norms, fostering deep emotional connection with readers through relatable characters and situations. They also provide a critical perspective on societal issues, encouraging reflection and discussion.

The Naturalism genre, with its subset Slice of Life, plays a crucial role in literature and media by providing an authentic representation of everyday life. It underscores the significance of the ordinary and offers a lens through which the complexities of human experiences and societal conditions can be understood and appreciated.

2.3. Studies on Earlier Works

Hoshino Mayo's タナトスの誘惑 and YOASOBI's 夜に駆ける

This Japanese song by the group called Yoasobi is a product of story retelling. They made the lyrics based on the story titled タナトスの誘惑 (Thanatos no Yūwaku/Temptation of Thanatos) by Hoshino. "The Temptation of Thanatos" by Hoshino Mayo is a short story that delves into themes of death, love, and mental illness. The narrative centers around two characters: a man and a woman. The woman frequently contemplates suicide and calls the man to save her each time. This cycle of rescue and despair reveals deeper

complexities about their relationship and the man's own struggles with Thanatos, the death drive.

Throughout the story, the woman sees a "god of death" who calls to her, embodying her ideal and representing her desire for escape. The man initially tries to save her, believing she secretly wants to be stopped. However, it becomes evident that she is actually trying to bring him along into death with her. Ultimately, the story explores the interplay between their love, her allure to death, and his eventual succumbing to the same desire, as they leap together into the night.

The story uses vivid imagery and psychological depth to explore its themes, presenting a haunting look at how mental illness and the longing for death can intertwine with notions of love and salvation.

Yoasobi made the lyrics to match the depressed, gloomy mood of the story into the song. When you hear the song for the first time, you will be fooled by the upbeat melody of the song. The actual title of the song is 夜に駆ける (Yoru Ni Kakeru), which, when literally translated into English, should be titled Racing Into the Night. The English version of the song uses Into the Night as the title to keep the mood throughout the song. Although the melody is upbeat, the gloomy mood is there to explain the thoughts of someone who was severely governed by Thanatos (the God of Death) instead of being governed by Eros (the God of Life).

Linguistically, the English version of the song is unique. Although using several broken English, the translator captured the mood of the original Japanese lyrics, and the singer also tried to emphasise the same pronunciation in some words so that it would not sound too different from the Japanese version. For example, in the first line, in Japanese they put ‘沈むように溶けてゆくように’ (Shizumu you ni tokete yuku you ni) and in the English version they put ‘Seize a move, you’re on me, falling and we were dissolving’ instead of the real translation (In a sinking manner) to make it sound similar to the Japanese lyrics when sang.

In an interview with Billboard, YOASOBI said that they wanted to express the story as a grotesque that resides within beauty and cuteness, while maintaining the mood of the original work to blend with the color of the track. They tried to convey the emotions of the protagonist with my voice as if they were to write a gloomy tune to express the story, it would just become a bleak art piece, so they made it catchy and pop on purpose.

In this project, I will try to capture the song's original mood and remake it into a story later on while keeping the clarity of the original idea we had in mind.

CHAPTER III

PROCESS OVERVIEW

3.1. Project Description

This project, titled *A Healing Journey*, will talk about the healing process of someone with mental illness. This will be in the form of three short stories that will talk about living with mental illness and healing through art therapy. The three stories connect with each other, although it is not in chronological order. When reading the stories, you can still read the stories as it is, but if you want to read the three stories, it will make a lot of sense better.

3.2. Formal Elements of the Work

3.2.1. Characters

The novel's main character is Abimana Raharja (Abim), the son of a famous musician and a pianist with severe childhood trauma. He was a product of a mentally abusive mother and absent father, so he was scared to play the piano for about five years before he overcame it and became a big shot.

The supporting characters that will appear in all three stories are Mahesa and Jirendra (both are Abimana's friends). Anindya Kusuma's name will be mentioned a few times, but she is a dead man. Abim's father will not appear as much as he works abroad, but Mahesa's parents often seem to help Abim.

3.2.2. Settings

It is set in a dystopian city where society still lives according to its cultural heritage and modernised technology. The mix of traditional and modern contemporary settings is easy to imagine as there is no need to conclude thorough research about traditional or overly modernised settings.

3.2.3. Initial Plot

Each story intricately delves into Abim's daily experiences, portraying the multifaceted challenges he faces while living with mental illness. The narrative paints a vivid picture of his ongoing struggle to navigate a world that often feels alienating and overwhelming. Despite the persistent obstacles posed by his mental health, Abim is shown actively seeking ways to manage and cope with his condition. The stories highlight his resilience and determination as he develops and employs various coping mechanisms to help him function in society. Through these everyday encounters, the reader gains insight into the complexities of living with mental illness and the continuous effort required to maintain a sense of normalcy and stability in his life.

3.2.4. Point of View

The point of view of the whole novel will use the third person limited point of view. There are a lot of advantages to using a third-person limited POV. Using the third person limited POV will benefit the narrator as they will know what the main character feels or thinks, but it

will be limited to that at a time. First, it will all result in the allowance of working on the inner workings of one character at a time; then, the reader will get a more developed character. Second, the writer will also be able to hide some information from readers, which can then develop into a severe plot twist. Third, when writing in the third person limited, the author will have the flexibility of zooming in on specific descriptions (in this case, a character's paid attention) because the writer is not obliged to be objective in your descriptions, especially when the writer is writing in chosen character's voice. Last but not least, the reader could relate more to the selected character, which the third person offers the intimacy limited POV because the reader will see everything through the chosen character's eyes.

3.2.5. Genre

As stated before, I will use the slice-of-life genre where readers can relate to the stories that I wrote, although being a little bit dramatized. The aim is to capture the essence of everyday experiences with a touch of exaggeration that highlights the emotional highs and lows of ordinary life. By focusing on the intricacies of daily interactions and personal growth, I hope to create narratives that resonate deeply with readers, offering both familiarity and fresh perspectives. Each story will delve into the characters' struggles and triumphs, weaving a tapestry of moments that, while perhaps embellished, reflect the universal truths of human experience.

3.3. Stages of Creation

3.3.1. Doing research

Knowledge of how people get mental illness and the classification of mental illness is needed to create a realistic fiction story that could happen in real-life situations. This knowledge will also help reduce the number of plot holes in the stories.

Researching the song and its implicit meaning is also essential, as this project was about retelling stories from songs. Listening to several songs to get some inspiration and reading trivial short stories will help to gain many ideas for writing the stories and avoid the so-called writer's block. This was conducted from August 2022 to January 2023.

3.3.2. Building the abstract plots

One thing that should be considered when writing a story is the plot: how the story goes, what conflict the main protagonist will go through, and how the settings are imagined. Not only that, but the plot will also guide the reader through the sequence of events that will keep them engaged and interested in what will happen next. It will also help to cover the events logically as the main protagonist will be taken into a happy or tragic ending as planned. This stage had been done from January 2023 to July 2023.

3.3.3. Writing the stories

As the abstract plot comes to the surface, the next step is to explain and illustrate it to make it accessible and attainable. Obviously,

the way to do that is to write the narrative version of the abstract plot, using all the methods of a short story. Writing the base stories had been done around July 2023 to December 2023.

3.3.4. Proofreading and editing

Editing and proofreading are essential because they improve the writing style's effectiveness and the ideas' clarity. Editing allows re-reading of the draft to check for more significant issues, including the organisation, paragraph structure, and the story's content. Meanwhile, proofreading focuses on finding and correcting writing, grammar, and language errors. Proofreading was done around December 2023 to March 2024. During March 2024 to June 2024, the editing stage began.

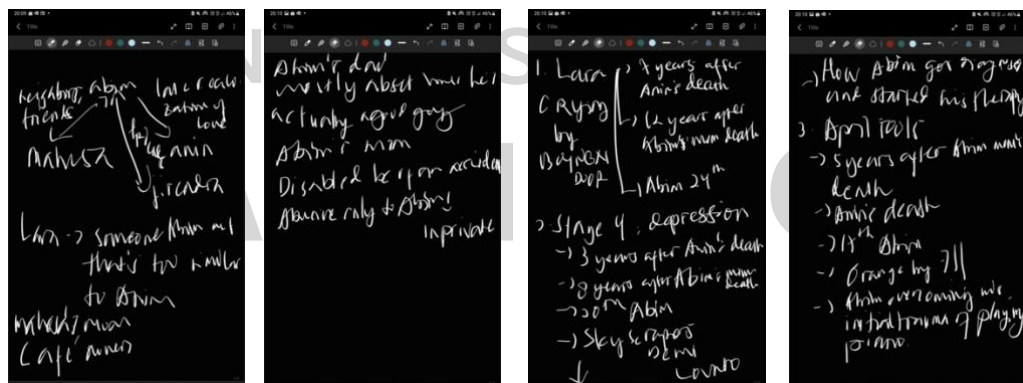
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CHAPTER IV

PROCESS NOTES

4.1. Conceptualisation

Before writing the stories, conceptualising how would the stories unfold is crucial because it provides a clear roadmap for narrative development and ensures coherence in the plot. This planning phase helped me to define character arcs, thematic elements, and the overall structure, allowing for a more focused and purposeful writing process. It also aided in identifying key turning points, emotional beats, and the integration of therapeutic themes, particularly when addressing complex topics like mental health. By outlining the story in advance, I could manage the pacing better, avoid plot inconsistencies, and enhance the depth and authenticity of the narrative, ultimately leading to a more compelling and impactful story.



Picture 4.1 Initial premises of the stories

4.1.1. Character Conceptualisation

When conceptualising the characters in the stories, it was crucial to delve into both their internal and external worlds, to ensure that they are multi-dimensional and relatable. This process involves exploring their motivations, fears, relationships, and the experiences that shape their identities. The initial muses and face claims of these characters are K-pop idols, but to avoid any copyright and claims, I will not have any of those names and faces in the stories.

a. Abimana Raharja

The main character of the stories is Abimana Raharja, known for his prodigious talent as a pianist. He has a significant presence on social media, having a large follower count due to his family name and the sorrowful, emotionally resonant quality of his music. Despite his public persona, Abim struggles with deep personal issues stemming from an abusive childhood and an absent father. He has been practically adopted by the family of his friend Mahesa, who lives across from his family's house. Abim's physical appearance is marked by a slender build, dark hair that often falls into his eyes, and an air of melancholy that never seems to leave him.

Abim's psychological landscape is shaped by a complex interplay of trauma, abandonment, and a relentless pursuit of perfection. The emotional scars left by his mother's harsh training

methods and his father's absence have led to feelings of inadequacy and deep-seated anxiety. His music serves as both an escape and a means of expressing his inner turmoil. Abim's depression has culminated in self-harm and a suicide attempt, indicating a critical need for mental health intervention. His journey through therapy and the support of his close-knit circle are central to his development throughout the narrative.

Abim's primary motivation is to find solace and a sense of self-worth beyond the expectations imposed upon him by his family and the public. His internal conflict revolves around the struggle to reconcile his passion for music with the pain it brings due to his traumatic past. Externally, he faces the pressures of maintaining his public image while battling his mental health issues in private. The tension between his private suffering and public persona is a recurring theme, driving much of the plot's emotional weight.

Abim embodies the themes of mental health awareness, the impact of familial expectations, and the healing power of art. His character arc illustrates the journey from despair to acceptance, highlighting the importance of support systems and professional help in overcoming mental health challenges. Through Abim's story, the thesis aims to explore how creative expression can serve as a therapeutic outlet, offering insights into the complex relationship between trauma, art, and recovery.

Over the course of the narrative, Abim undergoes significant development. His initial state of despair and isolation gradually gives way to moments of clarity and self-acceptance. Key turning points include his decision to seek therapy, the unwavering support from Mahesa and his parents, and his eventual recognition of his own worth beyond his musical talent. These developments are carefully mapped out to reflect a realistic and compassionate portrayal of mental health recovery.

By delving into Abim's character, the creative thesis seeks to provide a nuanced and empathetic depiction of a young artist's struggle with mental illness, aiming to foster a deeper understanding and dialogue about these critical issues.

b. Mahesa Putra

Mahesa is a pivotal character in the narrative, serving as a steadfast friend and a brotherly family figure to Abim. His relationship with Abim is marked by deep mutual respect and a strong emotional bond that has developed over the years. As a medical student with a compassionate nature, Mahesa often finds himself providing both emotional and practical support to Abim, particularly during moments of self-harm. Additionally, Mahesa helps out at his mother's café, a place that also holds significant value in his and Abim's lives.

The dynamics of Mahesa's relationships are pivotal in shaping his character. His bond with Abim is the cornerstone of his personal life, marked by a deep sense of loyalty and brotherhood. This relationship is layered with moments of joy, tension, and mutual support, reflecting the complexities of real-life friendships. Additionally, his relationship with his parents, who have also played a significant role in Abim's life, adds another layer of depth. They serve as role models and a support system for Mahesa, influencing his compassionate approach to care.

Driven by a desire to help others, Mahesa pursued a career in medicine. His experiences with Abim's mental health struggles have profoundly influenced his career choice, imbuing his medical studies with a personal mission. Mahesa's medical training equips him with the skills to provide immediate care and emotional support to Abim. As a medical student, Mahesa represents the intersection of personal relationships and professional responsibilities. His character illustrates how knowledge and empathy can come together to provide holistic care, showcasing the potential for healing through a combination of personal support and professional intervention.

c. Anindya Kusuma

Anin's internal world is shaped by her terminal illness, her passion for the violin, and her complex emotions regarding her relationships and her own mortality. Her motivation to perform

stems from a deep love for music and a desire to express herself fully, despite her illness. She channels her initial emotions into her performances, often 'beating' her piano accompanists with her intense passion and unique interpretation. Anin's fears revolve around her impending death and the dreams she feels she cannot achieve due to her illness. This internal struggle between her passion for life and the limitations of her health adds depth to her character.

Anin's external world encompasses her life as a violinist, her interactions with friends and family, and her experiences in competitions and performances. She is known for her intense and emotional performances, which leave a lasting impression on her audience. Despite her illness, she maintains a vibrant presence in her external world, often surprising those around her with her resilience and dedication. Her kind image was a result of her parents' parenting style as they were always supporting Anin with whatever she wants.

Anin's relationship with Abim, although he was not realising the mutual love until her death, is a significant part of her external world, providing moments of joy and connection.

Anin's relationships play a critical role in defining her character. Her bond with Abim is marked by a deep, unspoken love that blossoms too late for them to fully explore. Their connection is built on shared passions and mutual respect, with music being a central part of their relationship. Anin's dynamic with Mahesa, her

classmate and Abim's close friend, adds another layer to her interactions, showing her ability to connect with others despite her illness. These relationships highlight her capacity for love and friendship, adding richness to her character.

Anin's role in the narrative is pivotal. She serves as a catalyst for Abim's emotional growth and self-realisation. Her death profoundly impacts Abim, leading him to confront his own feelings and his approach to life and music. Anin's presence, even after her death, continues to influence the narrative, as her memory drives Abim's actions and decisions. Her character arc, though tragically cut short, leaves a lasting legacy in the story, emphasising themes of love, loss, and the enduring impact of meaningful relationships.

Symbolically, Anin represents the beauty and tragedy of life. Her passion for music and her vibrant personality contrast with her terminal illness, embodying the fleeting nature of existence and the importance of seizing the moment. Thematically, her character highlights the intersection of passion and mortality, showing how one can live fully even in the face of death. Anin's story underscores the themes of resilience, the power of music, and the impact of deep emotional connections.

Anin's development throughout the story is crucial, even as she faces the limitations of her illness. Her initial motivations and fears evolve as she deepens her relationships and confronts her

mortality. Moments of vulnerability, where she reflects on her unfulfilled dreams and the reality of her condition, contribute to her growth. These experiences help Anin become more self-aware and accepting of her fate, demonstrating emotional and personal development. Her growth is reflected in her increasing ability to find joy and purpose in her music and relationships, despite her illness.

d. Larasati Pertiwi

Lara's internal world is shaped by her experiences of betrayal, heartbreak, and the subsequent journey towards self-discovery and healing. She is a resilient individual who, despite her emotional turmoil, finds solace in writing. Her motivation to write stems from a need to process her emotions and make sense of her experiences. Lara is introspective, often reflecting on her past and drawing inspiration from it for her stories. Her struggle with feelings of inadequacy and the lingering pain of her breakup are central to her character, driving her actions and decisions.

Her initial encounter with Abim at the café, where he helps her during a rainstorm, sets the stage for their evolving relationship. Despite the pain of seeing her ex-boyfriend with her archenemy, Lara chooses to channel her energy into writing, turning her heartbreak into creativity. Her environment, including the Mahesa's mother café where she frequently writes and the places that remind her of her past relationship, plays a significant role in her external

world. These settings are imbued with emotional significance, influencing her mood and creative output.

Lara's relationships are pivotal to her character development. Her connection with Abim, although initially based on a superficial resemblance to Anin, evolves into a deeper, more meaningful bond. Lara is intrigued by Abim's sorrowful piano compositions, finding a sense of familiarity and comfort in his music. Her interactions with him are marked by a blend of curiosity and empathy, as she senses the underlying pain in his melodies. The dynamic with her ex-boyfriend is fraught with betrayal and unresolved emotions, serving as a catalyst for her transformation. Lara's ability to forge new connections and find strength in her creative pursuits highlights her resilience and adaptability.

Lara's role in the narrative is pretty crucial, as she serves as a mirror to Abim's own struggles and a catalyst for his emotional growth. Her journey of healing and self-discovery parallels Abim's, creating a narrative symmetry that enhances the story's emotional depth. Through her writing, Lara not only processes her own pain but also helps Abim confront his unresolved emotions. Her stories, inspired by Abim's piano play, become a medium for mutual understanding and catharsis. Lara's presence in the narrative underscores themes of healing, creativity, and the transformative power of art.

Symbolically, Lara represents the possibility of renewal and the transformative power of creativity. Her ability to turn personal pain into artistic expression highlights the theme of resilience and the healing potential of art. Thematically, Lara's character explores the intersection of love, loss, and self-discovery. Her journey underscores the importance of confronting one's past to find peace and the role of art as a therapeutic tool. Lara's stories, infused with her emotional experiences, reflect the universal quest for understanding and acceptance.

Lara's character development is marked by her transition from a state of emotional turmoil to one of empowerment and self-acceptance. Initially devastated by her breakup, Lara gradually finds strength in her writing, using it as a means to process her emotions and reclaim her sense of self. Her growing bond with Abim, based on mutual empathy and creative collaboration, further facilitates her healing. Moments of introspection and vulnerability, where Lara confronts her fears and insecurities, contribute to her growth. Her journey is one of gradual self-discovery, culminating in a sense of purpose and inner strength.

Lara's presence in Abim's life serves as a catalyst for his own emotional journey. Her similarities to Anin initially draw Abim's attention, but it is Lara's unique qualities and resilience that ultimately impact him. Through her stories inspired by his music,

Lara helps Abim confront his unresolved feelings and find a path towards healing. Their interactions highlight the power of empathy and creative collaboration in overcoming personal struggles. Lara's role in Abim's story underscores the interconnectedness of their journeys, emphasising themes of mutual support and artistic expression.

e. Other characters

These are other characters that appear occasionally in the stories. They don't appear as much as the other five, but they have their own roles

- Abim's Parents

Abim's father is a renowned musician who frequently travels abroad for recitals, leaving Abim feeling fatherless and longing for a paternal presence. His father's sporadic presence in his life creates a sense of abandonment and emotional distance, despite the professional success that overshadows their relationship. Although the two of them were pretty much chill with each other, Abim still felt abandoned by the fact that he was mostly abroad.

Abim's late mother was also a pianist, driven by unfulfilled dreams and aspirations. Disabled due to an accident, she projected her ambitions onto Abim, pushing him relentlessly to achieve what she could not. Her abusive behavior, stemming

from frustration and disappointment, left deep emotional scars on Abim. She believed that through Abim, she could vicariously live out her dreams, resulting in a strained and traumatic mother-son relationship.

- Mahesa's Parents

Mahesa's parents are compassionate and nurturing individuals who have played a crucial role in Abim's life. Understanding the neglect Abim faced due to his father's frequent absences and his mother's abusive behavior, they stepped in to provide the care and support he desperately needed. Mahesa's mom owns a cosy café where both Mahesa and Abim occasionally help out when they are free. The café not only serves as a place of work but also as a safe haven for Abim, where he finds solace and a sense of belonging. Mahesa's parents treat Abim as their own son, offering him emotional stability, guidance, and a loving environment that contrasts sharply with his tumultuous home life. Their unwavering support has been instrumental in helping Abim navigate the challenges of his past and present.

- Anin's Parents

Anin's parents are deeply supportive and loving individuals who have always stood by their daughter's decisions. They were heartbroken upon learning that Anin's battle with her

terminal illness was coming to an end. Their grief, however, did not diminish their capacity for compassion. Although not being shown in the story, after discovering the neglect and abuse Abim faced from his own parents through Mahesa's family, they extended their kindness to him. They frequently visit Abim, offering the same unwavering support and care they once gave Anin. Their visits provide Abim with emotional strength and a connection to Anin's enduring legacy of love and resilience.

- Jirendra Mahardika

Jirendra is Abim's closest friend and a talented volleyball athlete. During high school, he played on the same team as Mahesa, but while Mahesa chose to pursue a career in medicine, Jirendra continued to excel in volleyball. Known for his firm and tough demeanor on the court, Jirendra has a contrasting soft spot for Abim. The two have been classmates and good friends for years, and Jirendra has always been a source of strength and support for Abim. Despite his rigorous athletic career, Jirendra consistently makes time to be there for Abim, offering a steadfast presence and unwavering loyalty in his friend's life.

- Adrian Raja (Rian)

Rian was Lara's boyfriend until she discovered he was cheating on her with her archenemy from university. His outward charm masked a darker side; he was prone to abusive behavior,

especially when angry, though his anger wasn't always directed at Lara. His volatile nature made the relationship toxic and ultimately untenable, leaving Lara to pick up the pieces of her life and find strength after their tumultuous relationship ended.

- Professor Arjuna

Professor Arjuna is one of Mahesa's professors, known for his calm demeanor and extensive experience in the medical field. When Mahesa brought Abim to the hospital after his suicide attempt, Arjuna provided crucial advice and support. He is compassionate and wise, guiding Mahesa not only through the immediate crisis but also offering insights into long-term care and emotional support for Abim. Arjuna's mentorship has been instrumental in shaping Mahesa's approach to medicine and patient care.

- Dr. Sekar

Dr. Sekar is a compassionate and skilled therapist recommended by Arjuna to help Abim. With a background in both psychology and music therapy, she understands the profound impact of creative expression on mental health. Recognising Abim's deep connection to the piano, she suggests a therapeutic approach that incorporates his musical talent, allowing him to play the piano to release and process his emotions. Dr. Sekar is empathetic, patient, and dedicated to helping her

patients find healing and balance through personalised and innovative therapeutic techniques.

- Mbak Ratri

Mbak Ratri is the diligent and kind-hearted housekeeper who occasionally comes to Abim's house to ensure it stays clean and orderly. She has a quiet, nurturing presence and often goes beyond her duties, tidying up with care and attention to detail. Sometimes, Mahesa and Abim asks her to handle specific tasks when Abim is not around, trusting her reliability and discretion.

- Abim's new piano teacher

Abim's new piano teacher is a strict, uncompromising instructor with a teaching style reminiscent of Abim's late mother. Known for her harsh and often abusive verbal critiques, she believes in pushing her students to their limits, often crossing the line into emotional harm. Her words are cutting and relentless, aiming to force perfection through fear and pressure rather than encouragement and support. This approach reignites Abim's trauma, making each lesson a painful reminder of his past up to the point where Abim finally explodes with the suicide attempt (unknowingly). Despite her formidable reputation in the music community, her methods are controversial and emotionally damaging.

4.1.2. Song Selections

- a. “Skyscraper” by Demi Lovato



Picture 4.2 The album graphic of the song “Skyscraper” by Demi Lovato in Spotify

The first song that I chose for the first story is “Skyscraper” by Demi Lovato. This song was the first single from Demi Lovato’s third album *Unbroken*, released in 2011. The writer of the song, Toby Gad, Lindy Robbins and Kerli was inspired by a picture of the apocalypse in which the world was in ruins and, among collapsed buildings, one skyscraper was standing. In an interview with E! News, Lovato revealed that she first recorded the song in 2010 when her voice was weaker because she was "ruining it by damaging it after every meal," and then rerecorded it after undergoing treatment for her eating disorder. As Lovato herself is very open about her mental struggles, especially when she was diagnosed with bipolar disorders and experiencing eating disorders, this song is pretty personal to her as she did not even try to sugarcoat or redirect any conversations regarding her personal struggle.

“Skyscraper” by Demi Lovato showcases her newfound resilience after the *physical and emotional issues* as an effect of an eating disorder and self-harm attempts. In another interview with Billboard, Lovato said that the music video itself is an emotional release for her, just like how therapy works for her. She kept crying and was emotionally invested during the filming, and later on she realises that the music video itself can be depicted as her journey to heal.

As the initial premise of the stories is to ‘Retelling songs to a narrative form’, choosing “Skyscraper” by Demi Lovato is easy because the theme is inclined with the theme of the story I will make. The theme of personal mental struggles is prominent in the song, so the story will lean towards the personal mental struggle of the protagonist, Abim, and what will he do when he finally accepts the fact that he has mental issues.

b. “Crying” by BOYNEXTDOOR



Picture 4.3 The album graphic of the song “Crying” by BOYNEXTDOOR in Spotify

The second song that I chose is “Crying” by a new 6-member Korean boy group called BOYNEXTDOOR. When looking at the literal translation of the song, this song tells us about a story of a teenager going through a breakup with their lover. In the song, they are depicted crying endlessly after the breakup, and they continuously lie to say ‘I’m okay’ to their friends. Overall, the song explores the emotional turmoil we may experience after a breakup or a strained relationship, with lyrics expressing frustration, confusion, and vulnerability.

In an interview with Inquirer Super, it was revealed that three of the members participated in writing the lyrics. Jaehyun, Taesan, and Woonhak tried their best to make sense of the end of the first-love theme, searching for closure in the mid-tempo guitar and beats this song provides. One of the members, Riwoo, actually choreographs his part in the song where he expresses the obsessive feelings toward the breakup. In an interview with Panorama, Sungho, one of the members, became attached to the track as it embodies the overall emotions of the breakup they wanted to put into the EP, which explains the sorrow left behind after the breakup itself. The sentimental track sung with equanimity shows a contrasting side of emotions they depict in their debut which, on the contrary, shows a lot of cute first-love interactions.

“Crying” by BOYNEXTDOOR was chosen for the breakup theme, and to integrate it with psychological fiction, adding a little bit of anxiety and abandonment issue will help the story to be built. The story will lean towards how Abim and another character heal with the same form of therapy, although the cause of their mental struggles is different.

c. “Orange” by 7!!



Picture 4.4 The album graphic of the song “Orange” by 7!! in Spotify

The last song I chose is Orange by a Japanese band called 7!! (seven oops). Some people may translate orange as the literal fruit orange, but in actual, orange here depict the color of the sky in the dusk as the sun sets. This track was used as one of the ending theme for the anime series 四月は君の嘘 (Shigatsu wa kimi no Uso or in English, Your Lie in April). This song doesn’t literally talk about orange, because it is a reminiscent song of childhood love and hope for the future. Not only that, this song also talks about parting away, and it may feel onsome, but people will have to manage and taking their time to embrace the fond memories together.

There are no interviews about this particular song, so I can not find anything from the actual singers, but to summarize the song, the song talks about “How will I live without you later on” in a nostalgic mood. Not entirely negative, yet also not full of positive events. This track mixes up our emotions and talks about how to move on, to wish them well instead of dwelling about them and be depressed after they leave.

“Orange” by seven oops was chosen to integrate the background story of how Abim suffers from childhood traumas and how he initially overcome his trauma of not playing the piano after he met Anin. Later on, he realised that he loved her, but it was too late because Anin lost the fight from her terminal illness.

4.2. Execution

4.2.1. Story Summary and Premise of “Stage Four: Depression”

If we are talking about mental issues, suicide attempts may not be absent from the talk. The initial premise of this story is to show you that people can still heal themselves after a series of suicide attempts, but they still need support from other people who are close and not judgemental to them. By taking inspiration from the “Skyscraper” song, I can explain how Abim is insecure about going to therapy for his mental issues, but he wants to heal himself. The title itself is inspired by the five stages of grief, which are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross, E., & Kessler, D., 2009). The fourth stage, the

depression stage, is chosen as the title to explain about the stages of grief for Abim is in the story.

"Stage Four: Depression" follows Abim, a young pianist burdened by his abusive past and profound sorrow. Despite his musical talent and social media fame, Abim's life is marred by the trauma inflicted by his late mother and the absence of his father. After a suicide attempt, his best friend Mahesa finds him and rushes him to the hospital. Mahesa, with guidance from Dr. Arjuna, seeks professional help for Abim. The story highlights the importance of friendship, mental health awareness, and the therapeutic power of music. Mahesa's unwavering support underscores the necessity of a strong support system in overcoming depression and trauma.

4.2.2. Story Summary and Premise of "Lara"

The phenomenon of someone going through mental health issues after breaking up with someone they love dearly is prominent among teenagers and young adults these days. In short, they experienced something called attachment issues post-breakup so they could not move on from the relationship and their partner. Taking inspiration from the song "Crying" by BOYNEXTDOOR, I followed the theme of the breakup situation and how they overcame it with the help of someone else who is as broken as them. The title was actually an Indonesian wordplay, which I chose Lara that means sadness—Or when you're looking at the names of the characters, I choose Lara instead of the usual

Larasati or Laras to call her because of the wordplay. It can be synonymous with the song title, that is why I chose it as the title.

"Lara" follows a series of emotional events centered around Abim, Mahesa, and Lara. Abim, a café worker, brings a rain-soaked Lara inside, as she has just witnessed her boyfriend Rian with another girl. Given dry clothes and comfort by the café staff, Lara reflects on her abusive relationship with Rian and decides to break up with him, cleaning her apartment of his reminders. The experience triggers Abim's own emotional struggles as he recalls his lost love, Anin, due to Lara's resemblance to her. Lara later returns to the café to express her gratitude and begins to rebuild her life, free from Rian's toxicity.

4.2.3. Story Summary and Premise of “April Fools”

Taking inspiration from the ending theme of an anime, “Orange” by seven oops and following the nostalgic theme of the song, I presented a story where we can delve deeper into Abim’s initial life—How he overcame his initial trauma of playing the piano after he met Anin. Serves as a flashback from two stories before, this story is important to understand how Abim develops his mental issues. The title was chosen because I imagined that the time settings of this story happens around January to April, and in April 1st, the final stage of the story happened. In the first day of April, people know it was the time to pull a prank to somebody else, hence why people are calling it as the April Fools or April Mop. But in the story, April Fools was chosen to be the title as Anin’s

death happened at the same day, also it was the same day as Abim's initial comeback to the world of the pianist where he took his first new step towards his success as a pianist later on.

"April Fools" follows Abim, a piano prodigy, and his interactions with his friends Mahesa, Jirendra, and Anin. Abim has not played the piano in five years, following his mother's death and the traumatic, abusive experiences associated with his piano play and his mother's piano training. Mahesa and Anin are determined to get Abim to play again and register him for an international music competition without his consent. As Abim struggles with severe anxiety and memories of his mother's harsh criticism when he attempts to play again, it leads to an emotional breakdown. Meanwhile, Anin, inspired by Abim's past performances, faces her own health challenges. As both characters confront their fears and past traumas, they find support in their friendships and a renewed desire to express themselves through music.

4.3. Ethical Considerations

In this creative thesis, the narrative includes a scene where the main character, Abim, attempts to take his own life due to the traumatic experiences stemming from his abusive childhood and the absence of his father. Given the gravity of this subject matter, it is crucial to handle the portrayal of suicide with sensitivity and respect. This scene is crafted to reflect the character's profound struggle and not to sensationalise or trivialise the act of self-harm.

The inclusion of this scene is intended to shed light on the severe impact of trauma on mental health and to foster a deeper understanding of the psychological challenges that individuals may face. By depicting Abim's experiences and his journey towards seeking help, the narrative aims to contribute to the discourse on mental health, encouraging empathy and awareness among readers.

Prior to the section of the narrative that contains the scene of the suicide attempt, clear trigger warnings will be provided. These warnings will inform readers about the potentially distressing content, allowing them to make an informed decision about whether to continue reading. The goal is to minimise the risk of triggering or causing distress to individuals who may have personal experiences with similar issues.

In addition to trigger warnings, the thesis will include a list of mental health resources and support services at the beginning and end of the document. This ensures that readers who may be affected by the content have immediate access to information and assistance. The resources will include contact information for crisis helplines, mental health organizations, and counselling services.

The depiction of Abim's mental health struggles and his suicide attempt is based on thorough research and consultation with mental health professionals. This is to ensure that the portrayal is accurate and reflective of real-life experiences. The narrative will avoid stereotypes and will instead focus on the complexities of Abim's emotional and psychological state.

The primary objective of including this sensitive scene is to enhance the narrative's depth and to explore the themes of trauma, healing, and resilience. The scene is not included for shock value or dramatic effect but to serve as a pivotal moment in Abim's character development and his journey towards mental health recovery. The aftermath of the suicide attempt will be handled with care, showing the support systems and therapeutic interventions that aid in his healing process.

As the author, I recognise the responsibility to the readers, particularly those who may be vulnerable to the themes explored in this thesis. The ethical considerations outlined above are intended to ensure that the story is told in a manner that is both impactful and responsible, prioritising the well-being of the audience while addressing important mental health issues.

4.4. Reflection

Embarking on this creative thesis has been a profound journey that allowed me to explore the therapeutic potentials of art, music, and storytelling in addressing mental health issues. Throughout the process, several key insights and reflections emerged, shaping not only the project but also my understanding of the intertwined relationship between creativity and healing.

Creating characters like Abim, Mahesa, and Anin required deep introspection and empathy. Abim's journey through trauma and healing, influenced by his tumultuous relationship with his parents and the support from Mahesa's family, mirrored the struggles many individuals face with mental health. Mahesa's unwavering support and the complex dynamics of their

friendship highlighted the importance of a strong support system in the healing process. Anin's story, intertwined with Abim's, showcased the impact of mutual support and the power of music in navigating personal challenges.

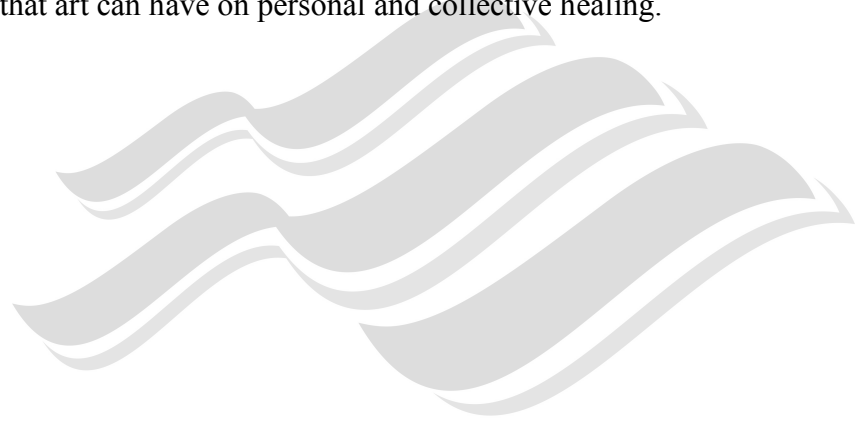
Not to mention the emotional bond between me and the characters as some of the events in the stories are inspired by my experience as someone with mental issues in therapy. In "Stage Four: Depression", the events were something that I experienced personally so when writing the story I feel like revealing the struggles I had and that was an emotional roller coaster. Even for someone who undergoes therapy for mental issues, in writing the story, I feel triggered by the words I weave, resulting in me having to take some medicines to reduce the anxiety I experienced.

In "Lara", however, as I never experienced to be in a toxic relationship, or even in a romantic relationship in general, writing it has been a challenge for me. In writing the story, I had to watch several movies, dramas and documentaries to write realistic situations of someone going through a toxic relationship and breakup. Personally, writing the romance genre has been a challenge for me as I have never experienced one, but I managed to write one, although the romance is not prominent in the story.

In "April Fools", the challenge is researching music competitions, violin pieces and piano pieces that can be used in the competition itself. Other than that, the subtle feelings of love Abim felt towards Anin is a fun thing to explore too. The thing about subtle love is the fact that Abim did not realise

that he feel emotionally attached to Anin as she was the one who helped him overcome his trauma of playing the piano.

Engaging with these themes enhanced my appreciation for the therapeutic power of the arts and fostered a deeper empathy for myself and those who are struggling with mental health issues. This project underscored the importance of creating safe spaces for expression and the profound impact that art can have on personal and collective healing.



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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1. Conclusion

The project addresses the urgent and often overlooked issue of mental health in Indonesia. Mental health problems are widespread, yet societal stigma and outdated practices like 'pasung' (physical restraint of the mentally ill) persist. The document emphasizes the holistic nature of health, where mental well-being is as crucial as physical health. It advocates for innovative therapeutic approaches that are both effective and culturally resonant to tackle these challenges.

Through the therapeutic project titled "A Healing Journey", I am aiming to use art therapy to improve mental health outcomes. Art therapy, including narrative and expressive arts therapies, is highlighted as a powerful tool for emotional healing and personal growth. In the project, I am integrating story retelling through songs and various forms of art, offering a multifaceted approach to therapy.

The core of the project involves personally engaging in creative activities where I can express their emotions and experiences through art and music. This method not only helps in processing and understanding my own feelings but also provides a non-verbal outlet for those who find it difficult to articulate their mental health struggles. The narrative component allows individuals to reframe their personal stories, fostering a sense of empowerment and control over their lives.

"A Healing Journey" aims to achieve several objectives: raising awareness about mental health issues, reducing the stigma associated with mental illness, and promoting the therapeutic benefits of art and music. By showcasing the success of this integrative therapy approach, the project hopes to inspire broader acceptance and implementation of art therapy in mental health care in Indonesia.

The project underscores the importance of culturally sensitive approaches, suggesting that therapy should not only be about treatment but also about understanding and respecting the cultural context of the patients. By combining modern therapeutic techniques with traditional and cultural elements, the project aspires to create a more effective and empathetic mental health care system.

This creative thesis has been an enlightening and transformative journey. It has reinforced the belief that integrating various art forms, storytelling, and music can significantly contribute to mental health healing. The process of creating and reflecting on this project has deepened my understanding of the therapeutic potential of the arts and the importance of ethical considerations in addressing sensitive topics. This experience has not only shaped my academic and creative pursuits but has also profoundly influenced my perspective on mental health and the healing power of creativity.

5.2. Suggestion

There are several recommendations for general public, the English Letters Program of Universitas Ma Chung, and the Students of English Letters Program of Universitas Ma Chung that I would like to address:

5.3.1. For General Public

For general public, especially for those who read the story, it is beneficial to take care of your own mental health, and not to mock those who have it; they might be triggered and it could lead to something unexpected. For those who may have or have been diagnosed with mental issues, by reading the stories I hope that they can cheer themselves up and be more aware of the difficulties other people go through. It is okay to see every moment through a different perspective than just seeing through one that is only on the surface. Everyone has different problems and different coping mechanisms, so it would be cool to understand their needs and not worsening their conditions, problems, and difficulties.

For those who have never been diagnosed with any mental illness, if you ever feel some symptoms of mental illness, it is completely okay to go to the psychiatrist for a little bit consultation. The thing about mental illness is that if we let out our emotions, you will feel much better than before. Having mental illness is not a shameful condition; it is a condition to know ourselves better and to make a better decision in the future.

5.3.2. For the English Letters Study Program of Universitas Ma Chung

In the English Letter Program of Universitas Ma Chung, we learn about a lot of theories to understand human behavior, and in the Creative Writing subjects, we learn about how to write both non-fiction and fiction stories. For this, I'd have to suggest that teaching them about how to write your own stories in a fictional form will be fun to do. Writing something that's inspired by your own experience can help in getting out of several bad things that had been inside your mind.

Next thing I want to suggest the department is to use some stories that the students and alumni have been written in some of the other subjects (like in reading subjects or literary appreciation class) for review, and that would promote more of the capabilities of the students in writing and to be proud of it.

5.3.3. For Students

For the students, I know everyone is struggling in their own ways, and that they probably realize that life is tough. For that, I had to suggest that using creative writing as a tool for personal reflection and emotional exploration will help in getting out of unspoken things inside your mind. Writing poetry, short stories, or journals can help articulate complex emotions and contribute to self-understanding.

Next, undertaking creative projects that address mental health issues, either through critical essays or creative works will help you to understand how mental issues affects people and their lives. This can

include writing stories, essays, or poems that highlight mental health themes or participating in art projects that integrate literary elements.



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APPENDICES



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Stage Four: Depression

Trigger warning

This content contains descriptions of attempted suicide, self-harm, and themes of severe mental health struggles. Reader discretion is advised. Call 119 ext 8 (SEJIWA) for Mental Health Assistance and Suicide Prevention.

Go run, but I'm gonna stay right here and watch you disappear. It's a long way down but I am closer to the clouds up here (Demi Lovato – Skyscraper)

For Abim, the piano was much more than just an instrument; it was a sanctuary, a confidant, and a mirror to his soul. Each key held the weight of his past, a silent witness to the tumultuous journey he had endured. The glossy black and white keys felt smooth under his fingers, their cool touch grounding him in moments of distress.

When he pressed a key, it was like unlocking a door to his emotions, allowing a flood of feelings to pour out in a cascade of notes. The rich, resonant tones of the lower register provided a comforting embrace, a deep rumble that echoed the depth of his sorrows and fears. The higher notes, clear and pure, seemed to lift his spirit, offering glimpses of hope and moments of clarity amidst the chaos of his mind.

The piano's body, with its elegant curves and polished surface, reflected the light in the room, casting subtle glimmers that danced like fleeting memories.

Abim often found himself tracing the grain of the wood, finding solace in its smooth, unbroken lines. It was a steadfast presence in his life, unchanging and reliable, even when everything else felt uncertain.

Sitting at the piano, Abim felt a sense of control and release. The act of playing allowed him to channel his inner turmoil into something beautiful and tangible. Each composition was a dialogue between him and the piano, a conversation where words were unnecessary. The pedals under his feet responded to his touch, adding layers of nuance to his expression, like the subtleties of his own emotions.

There was one time when the piano didn't even calm Abim down. As a pianist, of course piano is one crucial thing in his life, although sometimes, playing piano to get all of those dwelling emotions out doesn't really help. And that was when he finally cut his arms, and Mahesa had to brought him to the hospital.

Abim was a young man in his early twenties, distinguished by a blend of quiet charisma and a palpable aura of melancholy. Tall and slender, his appearance was marked by a certain elegance, shaped by the countless hours he spent at the piano. His deep-set eyes, often shadowed by dark, tousled hair, carried a look of profound introspection, revealing the depths of his inner world.

As a pianist, Abim was a prodigy whose sorrowful melodies resonated deeply with audiences. His playing, imbued with an emotional intensity that seemed to pour directly from his soul, had garnered him a significant following on social

media. Fans were captivated not just by his technical prowess but by the raw, heartfelt emotion that each performance conveyed.

His rise to fame was intertwined with his family's prominent name in the music industry, a legacy that opened many doors but also came with its own set of expectations and pressures. Despite the advantages of his family's reputation, Abim's music spoke for itself, touching the hearts of listeners and earning him recognition for his unique, sorrow-laden style.

Abim's personal life, however, was far from the glamorous image his public persona might suggest. His father, once a towering figure in his life, had been absent for many years, leaving a void that Abim felt keenly. His mother, on the other side, often hits him or scream to him for every piano practice, causing him to develop a severe trauma during his teenager phase. The hittings and screaming only stopped when his mom died several years ago. Thus, the absence of father and a great figure of mother was mitigated by Mahesa and his parents, who lived across the street from Abim's family home. They had practically adopted him, providing the love and stability that his own family could not. Mahesa's parents treated him as their own, offering support and a sense of belonging that was otherwise missing from his life.

In his last year of university, Abim was just an average student, balancing the demands of his studies with his burgeoning career as a musician. The academic world didn't hold the same allure for him as music did, but he persevered, knowing the importance of completing his education. His university life was a whirlwind of

lectures, assignments, and late-night study sessions, interspersed with the solace he found at the piano.

Mahesa was a constant presence in his life, a steadfast friend who had been by his side through thick and thin. Their bond was deep and unwavering, rooted in years of shared experiences and mutual support. Mahesa's family was Abim's refuge, a place where he could escape the pressures of his public life and find some semblance of normalcy. On the other side, Jirendra who also became a prominent figure for him—Always showed him an unwavering persona that inspired Abim to go through his (sometimes) bitter life.

Despite his outward success, Abim was still a young man, grappling with the shadows of his past and the weight of his family's legacy. His music was his outlet, a way to process his emotions and connect with others on a profound level. In many ways, Abim was a paradox: a rising star whose brightest moments were born from his deepest sorrows, a young man striving to find his place in a world that both celebrated and misunderstood him.

It's normal that not all people liked him, and that was how he got into a terrible panic attack until Mahesa found him lying helplessly on the floor in the piano room in Abim's house. Blood splattered around Abim's wrist while Mahesa found a bloody cutter and a broken phone nearby. The once pristine floor was now marred by dark crimson droplets that seemed to form a macabre mosaic around Abim's limp hand. His wrist, slick with blood, lay motionless against the cold tiles, the stark red of his lifeblood contrasting sharply with his pale skin.

Mahesa, heart pounding in his chest, felt a surge of panic and desperation as he knelt beside Abim. The bloody cutter lay discarded a few feet away, its blade glinting ominously under the harsh fluorescent lights, smeared with fresh blood. The broken phone, shattered screen and cracked case, was a silent witness to the chaos that had unfolded. Fragments of glass from the phone's screen were scattered across the floor, some pieces glistening with tiny streaks of blood, indicating a struggle or a desperate last act.

The room was eerily silent, save for the shallow, ragged breaths that Mahesa struggled to control. He could hear his own heart thundering in his ears as he frantically checked Abim's pulse, praying for any sign of life. Abim's face was ashen, his eyes closed, and his body unnaturally still, save for the faintest rise and fall of his chest.

Mahesa's mind raced, trying to piece together what had happened. The sight of the bloody cutter and the broken phone filled him with a dread that was almost paralysing. Had Abim tried to call for help? Had he reached out in his final moments of despair? Questions flooded his mind, but there was no time for answers now.

With trembling hands, Mahesa pulled his phone from his pocket, dialing emergency services with a mix of urgency and fear. As he waited for the call to connect, he gently wrapped a cloth around Abim's wrist, applying pressure to stem the bleeding, his fingers slick with blood. The operator's voice on the other end of

the line was a distant echo in his ears as he relayed their location, his voice shaking with emotion.

"Please, send help quickly," Mahesa pleaded, his eyes never leaving Abim's lifeless form. "My friend, he's... he's bleeding out. Please hurry."

As he hung up, Mahesa leaned in closer to Abim, whispering words of comfort and encouragement, hoping that somehow, in some way, his friend could hear him. The room seemed to close in around them, the weight of the situation pressing down heavily as they awaited the arrival of help.

As a med-school student, Mahesa knew how to treat a patient, but he was too anxious to accept the fact that someone who was like a brother to him was trying to kill himself. Along the way to the hospital, he was unable to cry as he chanted every prayer he knew while holding Abim's other hand, hoping for a slight miracle to happen.

The ambulance ride felt like an eternity, though it was only minutes long. Mahesa sat hunched over in the cramped space, his heart pounding erratically as the sirens wailed around them. The rhythmic thump of the tyres against the road only added to his anxiety, each jolt and bump a reminder of how fragile the situation was.

Abim lay on the stretcher, pale and lifeless, his wrist bandaged but still oozing blood through the makeshift dressings. The paramedics worked quickly, their movements efficient and practised, but to Mahesa, it all felt painfully slow.

He could see the red staining the white gauze, spreading ominously, and it made his stomach churn with fear.

Mahesa's mind raced, a chaotic whirl of thoughts and worries. He replayed the moment he found Abim over and over, unable to shake the image of his friend lying in a pool of his own blood. He kept glancing at the paramedics, trying to read their expressions, searching for any sign of reassurance. But their faces were masks of professional calm, revealing nothing of the gravity of the situation.

He felt helpless, utterly and completely. There was nothing he could do but sit there, watching as the paramedics worked, praying silently that Abim would make it through. His hands were clammy, gripping the edge of the seat until his knuckles turned white. He tried to focus on his breathing, to calm the rising tide of panic, but it was no use. Every sound, every jolt of the ambulance, made his anxiety spike.

Mahesa leaned in close to Abim, whispering softly, his voice trembling. "Hang in there, Abim. Please, just hang in there." He wasn't sure if Abim could hear him, but he hoped, desperately, that his words would reach him somehow.

The interior of the ambulance was filled with the steady beeping of the heart monitor, each beep a lifeline that Mahesa clung to. He watched the numbers, willing them to stay steady, to not drop. The paramedic closest to him glanced up briefly, offering a quick, reassuring nod, but it did little to soothe Mahesa's frayed nerves.

As they sped through the city streets, the world outside blurred past, irrelevant and distant. All that mattered was Abim, lying so still, his life hanging by a thread. Mahesa felt tears prick at the corners of his eyes, but he blinked them away, refusing to break down. He had to be strong, for Abim.

Minutes stretched on like hours, each one a torturous wait. Finally, the ambulance began to slow, the sirens still blaring as they approached the hospital. Mahesa's heart leapt with a mix of hope and dread. They were almost there, but the real battle was just beginning.

As the ambulance came to a halt and the doors were flung open, Mahesa felt a surge of adrenaline. He followed closely as they wheeled Abim out, his legs shaky but determined. He wouldn't leave his friend's side. Not now, not ever.

Mahesa's parents rushed to the emergency room, only to find Mahesa trembling with fear as he fiddled with his fingers. They approached him slowly, and as Mahesa's dad put his hand onto his back to caress him, Mahesa broke down. His mind was a whirlwind of emotions—fear, guilt, helplessness—all crashing into him with an overwhelming force. The sight of Abim on the stretcher, pale and lifeless, flashed repeatedly in his mind. The blood, the frantic rush of the paramedics, the cold, clinical environment of the hospital—it was all too much. His chest tightened, making it hard to breathe, and his vision blurred as tears welled up in his eyes.

Why didn't he notice the signs? Why wasn't he there for Abim when he needed him the most? The questions tortured him, each one a knife twisting in his heart. He felt a crushing weight of guilt and regret, as if he had failed his friend in the worst possible way. Mahesa's hands shook as he tried to wipe away the tears, but it was futile. They kept coming, streaming down his cheeks and dripping onto his clothes. He leaned forward, his forehead resting on his knees, trying to curl into himself, trying to hide from the unbearable pain. He thought of the times they had shared, the laughs, the music, the bond they had formed. And now, all of it seemed so fragile, hanging by a thread. The idea of losing Abim was a void he couldn't fathom, a darkness that threatened to swallow him whole.

His parents stayed on his side, comforting him, and people passed by with a sympathetic look. But Mahesa was too occupied to notice the details. Minutes felt like hours as he sat there, his sobs gradually subsiding into quiet, heart-wrenching cries. He felt drained, both physically and emotionally, but he knew he couldn't leave. He had to be there for Abim, no matter what. He owed him that much. Eventually, a nurse reached up to the three of them, and with a soft voice, "Abimana Raharja's guardian?"

Mahesa's dad stood up while shaking his head. "His dad couldn't be reached, and he lived alone, can I do the administration?"

"And what would be your connection to the patient?"

"I'm his neighbor, we live across his house,"

When Abim finally opened his eyes, there was no one in the hospital room. He didn't know how long he had been unconscious or remember what happened before. One thing for sure was his arm was wrapped in a bandage, so he just assumed that he was admitted to the hospital after getting into an accident that injured his arm badly. After a few minutes in silence, the sliding door opened, showing him a figure of Mahesa with a bag—probably containing some med books he brought from the university.

"Hey," Abim's eyes, still hazy with confusion, slowly focused on Mahesa. He blinked a few times, as if trying to clear the fog from his mind. "Mahesa?" His voice was weak, barely more than a whisper, but it was unmistakably him.

Mahesa's heart soared. He leapt to his feet, knocking over the chair in his haste, and rushed to Abim's side. "You're awake," he said, his voice thick with emotion. "You're really awake."

Abim managed a small, tired smile. "Yeah, seems like it," he murmured, his gaze drifting around the room as if trying to make sense of his surroundings. "Why am I here?"

Mahesa blinked in disbelief, before he put his bag on the sofa in the hospital room. "You don't remember?"

Abim, on the other side, just shook his head. He laid in the hospital bed, the sterile smell of antiseptic in the air, mixed with the faint scent from the diffuser that Mahesa had brought. His eyes fluttered open, adjusting to the harsh fluorescent lights above. Everything seemed a little hazy, as if he were emerging from a deep, foggy dream. He turned his head slightly and saw Mahesa sitting beside him, eyes

red and tired but filled with mixed relief and worry. “The last thing I remembered was I called my piano instructor,”

Something clicked inside Mahesa’s head and he sighed. “Why did you do that?”

“I’m just ... curious, I mean—I also need feedbacks, right? She-she’s the one who could do that quickly,” Abim said weakly. “What happened?”

Mahesa just took a long breath, trying his best to swallow all the words he wanted to say to Abim. He knew that Abim could experience some memory loss caused by severe trauma, and he prepared himself for that especially since it was very traumatic for him to found Abim lying helplessly near his piano. “Nothing,”

“So, it wasn’t because he doesn’t want to talk about that, it’s because he doesn’t remember anything up to the moment he cut his arms?”

Mahesa knew the doctor. Professor Arjuna (that’s how Mahesa’s been calling him as) was one of the professors teaching him in the university, and he was relieved when he knew he would be the one treating Abim. “Yep, and as far as I knew, he was badly traumatised by his mom in the past—I have a bad feeling that his new piano teacher was doing the same thing as his mom, although she teaches him mostly through online meeting,” Mahesa added. “But he never hurt himself in the past, and that was shocking to find him cut his wrist like that.”

“Well,” Arjuna sighed. “Should we move him to the psych ward?” he asked to Mahesa who frantically shook his head.

“What’s the urge to put him in the psych ward—Him being in his house means that we could take care of him—”

“And letting another suicide attempt happen when he’s alone? You really want to take that risk?”

Mahesa was flabbergasted, and he shut his mouth up while saying, “No, Sir.”

Arjuna took a deep breath before saying, “I mean, memory loss is common between mentally struggling patients. And from your story, seems like he hasn’t even recover from his past traumas. But, you’ve done more than you realize, Mahesa. Being there for him, supporting him, that means everything. But remember, you can’t carry this burden alone. Professional help is crucial in situations like these.” Mahesa nodded, though the worry didn’t leave his eyes. “If you don’t want him to be admitted into the psych ward, I suggest you to take him for a therapy, but I still think it will be better if you take him to the psych ward anyway.”

“We need his father’s permission for that,” Mahesa answered. “He often leaves the country as he’s that famous of a conductor—We can’t even reach him when Abim was admitted to the hospital,” he continued, hands fiddling uncontrollably. “But he’s a good man, I swear, it’s just sometimes we can’t reach him—”

“There’s no need for a damage control like that, Mahesa,” his professor chuckled. “By the way, can we talk about other things—”

Mahesa was still at his mandatory class when he received a message from Abim's father. His fingers were writing something into the tablet when a pop-up notification appeared at the top of the screen. The professor was still explaining something in front of the class, but Mahesa's mind was elsewhere, preoccupied with thoughts from the message he received. When he opened the messaging service, he frowned slightly, before opening the message and began to read those words: "I can't go back home. I have an important recital in three weeks. Please take care of Abim for me."

Mahesa's heart skipped a beat, his hand tightening around the phone as he read the words again, hoping he had misunderstood or maybe missing some words which he didn't notice before. But the message was clear and unambiguous. His mind raced, grappling with the implications. For a moment, he was stunned into silence. How could Abim's father, knowing everything his son had been through, prioritize a recital over his own child's well-being? Anger and disbelief surged through Mahesa. He felt a burning sensation in his chest, his thoughts tumbling over each other in a whirlwind of emotions.

"He can't be serious," Mahesa muttered under his breath, his face flushing with a mix of anger and hurt. He stood up abruptly, causing his chair to scrape loudly against the floor. The sudden movement drew a few curious glances from his classmates, but Mahesa didn't notice. He was too consumed by the injustice of the situation.

"Mahesa, do you have something to say?"

He was forcefully pulled back to reality when the professor called him from the unusual action in the class. He closed his mouth, before, “Sir, I need to go to the bathroom.”

He left his class just like that, and in the bathroom, he quickly went into the sink and washed his face to get rid of those anger that were pent up inside his mind. The realization that Abim’s father had essentially abandoned him again, even in the face of such a crisis, was almost too much to bear. He felt a wave of sadness for Abim, imagining how this rejection would further deepen his friend’s sense of abandonment and pain.

Mahesa took a deep breath, trying to calm himself. He knew he had to stay strong for Abim’s sake. No matter how angry or hurt he felt, he couldn’t let those emotions cloud his judgment. Abim needed him now more than ever, and he would be there, just as he always had been.

Mahesa walked into the piano room, feeling a mix of curiosity and trepidation. He had never been one for music lessons, but Abim had insisted, and Mahesa lowkey wanted to know how he did his piano lessons. He knew what Abim’s piano room looked like—but he was slightly worried if Mbak Ratri hadn’t cleaned the blood splattered near the piano and the broken phone. But he took a long breath of relief when he saw the clean piano room.

The walls, painted a soft cream, were bare save for a single framed photograph of Abim and his father during happier times. The grand piano, a

magnificent black Steinway, stood proudly at the center of the room, its surface polished to a mirror-like shine.

The floors, previously scattered with sheet music and personal items, were now immaculate, every corner meticulously vacuumed and dusted. The piano bench, upholstered in rich black leather, was positioned perfectly, and a small stack of neatly arranged sheet music rested on top of it.

It had no trace of someone who tried to kill himself a few days ago, and Mahesa was really thankful to Mbak Ratri not to leave any trace of blood, and he was also thankful to Mbak Ratri who had the initiative of bringing the broken phone to a service centre and putting the now-okay phone onto the pile of music sheets in the room.

Abim stood motionless, his fingers hovering above his phone screen. The touch felt cold with numbing sensation that seemed to seep into his very bones. His eyes, wide and unblinking, were fixed on the screen of his phone, which lay beside the sheet music on the piano stand.

Notification after notification flashed before him, each one more venomous than the last. The hateful comments, cruel and relentless, assaulted his senses: *"You don't deserve your fame."* *"Pathetic. You're only here because of your dead Mom and your Dad that's overseas."* *"You put too much emotions in your piano play, I can't even decipher what you want to portray there."*

The background, showed the chatroom with his new teacher, where he had hoped for some constructive feedback, maybe even a bit of encouragement. Instead, harsh words cut through the fog of his mind like a knife: "*You put too much grief in your play.*" "*Disappointing as always. You need to do better.*" "*Is this really the best you can do?*" "*be there in 5*"

Abim's breath hitched, his chest tightening as if an iron band was being drawn around it. The words blurred together, their collective weight pressing down on him until he felt like he might collapse under the strain. His vision tunnelled, and the room around him faded, leaving only the harsh, unforgiving light of his phone screen. As he stared at the screen, memories of that fateful night came rushing back with brutal clarity. He could feel the suffocating weight of despair that had enveloped him, the overwhelming sense of worthlessness that had driven him to the brink. The phone in his hand felt heavier, like a conduit of his torment.

He remembered the cutter, its cold metal biting into his skin, the sharp sting followed by a warm, crimson trickle. The pain had been a strange comfort, a distraction from the emotional agony that consumed him. He had felt detached, as if he were watching someone else, a mere spectator to his own suffering. The notifications continued to flood in, each one a painful echo of his late mother's voices in his head. *You're a failure. Just give up.* He could almost hear them, a relentless cacophony that threatened to drown out any semblance of hope. The memory of that night intertwined with the present, the lines between past and present blurring.

He wanted to move, to escape the barrage of negativity, but his body refused to obey. Frozen in place, he could feel the sting of tears pricking at the corners of his eyes. Each comment, each word from his teacher, seemed to echo the doubts and fears that had always lurked in the corners of his mind.

Sensing that something was wrong, Mahesa on the other side, snatched the phone from Abim's hand. With that move, Abim suddenly fell limp as if his legs were jelly. With a trembling voice, he sounded as he put his hands to Mahesa, "Give me back the phone."

Mahesa, now looked angry as he scrolled through the tsunami of pop-up notifications, showing the comments Abim got on his public social media page, distanced himself from him as he annoyingly clicked his tongue. "Trashes," he mumbled. And when he closed the notification tab, his eyes caught a glimpse of the text from Abim's new teacher.

Mahesa's eyes narrowed as he scanned the screen of Abim's phone, his expression darkening with each passing second. The harsh words from Abim's piano teacher were like a series of jabs, each one driving deeper into his patience. His jaw clenched tightly, and a muscle in his cheek twitched with barely contained fury.

"Are you serious?" Mahesa hissed through gritted teeth, his voice low but seething with anger. He couldn't believe the cruelty and insensitivity of the message.

"How could she say something like this to you? After everything you've been through?"

Abim sat quietly on the floor, his shoulders hunched and his eyes downcast, clearly affected by the barrage of criticism and insults. Mahesa's anger only grew as he saw the toll the message was taking on his friend. He felt a fierce protective instinct surge within him, a burning need to shield Abim from such blatant abuse.

"She has no right," Mahesa continued, his voice rising with indignation. "She has no right to talk to you like this, to tear you down like this." He paced back and forth in the piano room, the phone gripped tightly in his hand. "This isn't teaching. This is bullying, plain and simple. Is this why you didn't tell me about how she treated you whenever you had a lesson with her?"

Abim looked up, a flicker of fear and confusion in his eyes. "Mahesa, please... It's not worth getting worked up over."

Mahesa stopped in his tracks, turning to face Abim with a fierce intensity. "Yes, it is. You deserve respect and support, not this... this garbage." He took a deep breath, trying to steady his raging emotions. "I'm going to do something about this. She can't keep doing that."

Abim shook his head slightly, his voice shaky. "What can you do? She's my teacher. I can't just..."

"We'll figure it out," Mahesa interrupted, his tone resolute. "But you don't have to put up with this. Not anymore." He handed the phone back to Abim, his expression softening slightly as he saw the vulnerability in his friend's eyes. "That's it. You deserve better, Abim. Now if you refuse to go to the psychiatrist as I and my professor told you, I will drag you involuntarily there."

In that moment, Mahesa's anger was not just an expression of his own outrage, but a fierce, protective response to the injustice being done to someone he cared deeply about. He knew he had a difficult road ahead, but he was determined to heal Abim.

Mahesa sat across from Jirendra on one of the beanbags. Mahesa took a deep breath, his eyes reflecting a mix of sadness and resolve as he began to speak about Abim's past. "Abim's mom... she was a force of nature," Mahesa started, his voice low and steady. "She had this fierce determination when it came to Abim's piano training. From the moment he could sit at a piano, she was there to make him a pianist."

Jirendra listened intently, his brows furrowing as he sensed the weight of the story.

"She had this belief that greatness was born from relentless discipline," Mahesa continued, his gaze distant as he recalled the memories. "Every day after

school, Abim would come home and sit at the piano for hours. There were no breaks, no playtime like other kids had. Just the piano.”

Mahesa’s voice grew softer, tinged with a hint of sorrow. “She was strict, often to the point of harshness. Mistakes weren’t just corrected; they were dissected, analyzed, and drilled out of him. I remember hearing her voice and screams through the open windows, correcting his posture, technique, and expression,” He paused, glancing at Jirendra, who was hanging on to every word. “Abim never complained, at least not out loud. But I could see the strain it put on him. The pressure to be perfect, to live up to her expectations, it was immense.”

Mahesa leaned back in his chair, running a hand through his hair. “It was like she was moulding him into this flawless pianist, but in the process, she overlooked the fact that he was just a kid. A kid who needed encouragement and love just as much as discipline.”

Jirendra nodded, a thoughtful look on his face. “That must have been incredibly tough for him.”

“It was,” Mahesa agreed, his voice heavy with emotion. “If you really want to know the core problem of what happened last week, is that his new teacher acts the same as his late mother. You know right, after meeting Anin he had a good teacher to teach him, and that teacher moved to another city just recently. He had to find another piano teacher, but he hit the *jackpot*.”

Mahesa's eyes met Jirendra's, filled with deep-seated sadness. "So are you saying that she's as harsh as his late mother?" Jirendra asked, and Mahesa just nodded.

Silence settled between them as Mahesa's words lingered in the air. Jirendra could feel the depth of Abim's struggle through Mahesa's heartfelt recounting, a story of talent nurtured through a demanding and often painful upbringing.

"And so, after I joined him for the class yesterday, I know exactly how she *trained* him, and trust me you would be angry too if you were there," Mahesa sighed in defeat. "That's why I asked my parents to bring him to one of the psychiatrists that was recommended by my professors."

"But why aren't you going with him?"

Mahesa grinned. "I had to wait for my sister anyway, she's coming home today. Also, Anin's parents will be here tomorrow, they told me I should stay to clean the house—And yep I think I did that already."

"There are some parts that are still dusty," Jirendra chirped, while Mahesa threw the sofa cushion playfully. "But anyway, what's the occasion? Why are the others here?"

Mahesa rolled his eyes playfully. "Abim, of course, they weren't able to visit him while he were hospitalized."

Abim sat on the edge of Mahesa's living room couch, hands trembling as he stared at the appointment card for his upcoming therapy session. The clinical font on the card seemed to mock him, each letter a reminder of the battles he had yet to fight. His heart raced, a cold sweat breaking out on his forehead. Therapy. The word alone sent shivers down his spine. It was a new frontier, a step into the unknown that he wasn't sure he was ready to take.

He felt uncomfortable as he looked up and found Mahesa's parents, Anin's parents, along with Mahesa and Jirendra all looking at him hopefully, but he was there, eyes wide with fear and uncertainty. Mahesa took Abim's hand first, his presence a comforting, familiar warmth. He was followed by Jirendra, whose steady, reassuring smile never wavered, and then Anin's and Mahesa's parents, their faces etched with concern and empathy.

"Hey, buddy," Mahesa said gently, sitting down beside Abim and putting a supportive hand on his shoulder. "Are you okay?"

Abim swallowed hard, his voice barely a whisper. "I'm scared, Mahesa. I don't know if I can do this."

Jirendra stepped forward, his expression calm and understanding. "It's okay to be scared, Abim. Therapy is a big step, but it's a step towards healing. You're not alone in this."

Anin's parents nodded in agreement. Her mother, her eyes glistening with unshed tears, reached out and took Abim's hand in hers. "We believe in you, Abim. You've already shown so much strength. This is just another part of your journey."

Abim's eyes filled with tears, the overwhelming support and love in the room making it hard to speak. "But what if...what if I can't handle it?" he asked, his voice breaking.

Mahesa squeezed his shoulder gently. "We'll be here every step of the way. You don't have to go through this alone. We're all here for you."

Jirendra nodded, his voice firm but kind. "Therapy is about taking things one day at a time. It's about finding ways to cope and heal. And we'll be here to help you through it."

Mahesa's father, who had been silent until now, spoke up, his voice deep and comforting. "You have a lot of people who care about you, Abim. Use that support. Lean on us when you need to. You're stronger than you think."

Abim took a deep breath, the fear still present but now accompanied by a glimmer of hope. He looked around at the faces of the people who cared about him, their unwavering support giving him the courage to face the challenges ahead. "Thank you," he said, his voice filled with emotion. "Thank you all."

As they continued to talk, the room filled with warmth and understanding, Abim felt a small but significant shift within himself. He was still scared, but he

also felt a newfound determination. With his friends and loved ones by his side, he began to believe that maybe, just maybe, he could face this journey head-on.

Obviously, Abim had several things that he's scared of, but knowing that there are people who supported him wholeheartedly, he knew he could go through the therapies. He took a deep breath, letting the comforting presence of his friends and Anin's parents anchor him in the moment. They sat together in the living room, the soft hum of the air conditioner providing a backdrop to their conversation.

Maheesa, always the first to break a heavy silence, smiled encouragingly. "Remember, Abim, it's okay to take things one step at a time. You don't have to have it all figured out right now."

Abim nodded, his hands still trembling slightly but his resolve strengthening. "I know. It's just... there's so much to unpack. My past, the way my mom pushed me, my father's absence, Anin's death and now this."

Anin's mother squeezed his hand gently. "Therapy will help you make sense of all that. It will give you tools to deal with the pain and find a way to heal."

Jirendra leaned forward, his expression serious but filled with compassion. "You don't have to do it alone, Abim. We're here for you. Whenever you need to talk or just need someone to sit with you, we'll be there."

Abim felt a lump in his throat, but this time it wasn't just fear—it was gratitude. "Thank you," he said softly. "I don't know what I'd do without you all."

Mahesa's father, who had been quietly observing, finally spoke up. "You're a strong young man, Abim. You've already come so far. Therapy is just the next step in your journey. Embrace it with the same courage you've shown us."

As the evening wore on, they talked about lighter things, reminiscing about old memories and sharing stories. The atmosphere gradually shifted from heavy and tense to light and hopeful. The supportive laughter and shared smiles filled Abim with a sense of belonging and acceptance that he hadn't felt in a long time.

When it was time for everyone to leave, Abim stood at the door, watching Anin's parents along with Jirendra made their way home. He felt a mixture of exhaustion and hope, knowing that tomorrow would bring its own set of challenges but also its own opportunities for healing.

"Goodnight, Abim," Mahesa said, obviously not letting Abim to go back home since the house is empty and there were no one there, it'll be better if Abim just stay at their home. "You can sleep with me today, but remember, you're not alone in this. Even if it's just to talk."

"I will," Abim replied, smiling slightly. "Goodnight, Mahesa."

As he closed the door, Abim took a moment to look around the quiet living room. The appointment card for his therapy session lay on the coffee table, a tangible reminder of the journey ahead. He picked it up, feeling the weight of the commitment it represented, but also the promise of healing.

In that moment, Abim realized that while the road to recovery might be long and fraught with challenges, he wasn't walking it alone. He had the support of those who cared about him, and with their help, he knew he could face whatever came his way.

When he saw the therapist's place for the first time, his eyes sparkled as he saw the big piano standing proudly in the corner of the waiting room. It was a grand instrument, its polished black surface gleaming under the soft lights. For a moment, Abim forgot about the anxiety gnawing at his insides, his heart lifting slightly at the sight of something so familiar and comforting. The therapist, a kind-looking woman in her early forties, noticed his reaction and smiled warmly. "Do you play?" she asked, gesturing toward the piano.

Abim nodded, his voice almost a whisper. "Yes, I do."

"You're welcome to use it anytime," she said, her smile reassuring. "Music can be a wonderful outlet for expressing what we can't always put into words."

He felt a wave of relief wash over him. Knowing that he could escape to the piano whenever he needed to make the idea of therapy less intimidating. He took a deep breath, feeling a bit more settled.

The therapist led him into her office, a cozy room filled with soft chairs, bookshelves, and calming artwork. There were a few more instruments scattered

around—a guitar, some percussion instruments, and even a small harp. It was clear that this was a space designed for healing in many forms.

"Please, have a seat," she said, motioning to a comfortable chair. Abim sat down, feeling a mixture of nervousness and hope. "I'm Dr. Sekar. It's nice to meet you, Abim."

"Nice to meet you too," he replied, trying to steady his voice.

Dr. Sekar leaned back in her chair, her expression gentle and patient. "I understand that you've been through a lot recently. Therapy can be a space where we explore those experiences together and find ways to cope and heal."

Abim nodded, unsure of what to say. The words seemed stuck in his throat, but he knew he had to start somewhere. "I... I've had a rough time," he began, his voice trembling slightly. "My childhood, my mom, my friend's death, and recently, the harsh comments from my- my social media pages, along with my new teacher, it's just ... things just got too much."

Dr. Sekar nodded, her eyes filled with empathy. "It's okay, Abim. Take your time. This is a safe space for you to share whatever you're comfortable with."

He took a deep breath, trying to gather his thoughts. "Playing the piano has always been my escape," he said, his gaze drifting to the door where he could just see the edge of the piano in the waiting room. "But even that hasn't been enough lately."

"Music is a powerful tool, undoubtedly," Dr. Sekar said softly. "It can help us access and express our deepest emotions. Perhaps we can ... incorporate it into your therapy?"

Abim felt a flicker of hope. "I'd like that," he said, his voice a bit stronger.

They talked for a while longer, with Abim sharing bits and pieces of his past. Dr. Sekar listened intently, occasionally offering insights and gentle guidance. By the end of the session, Abim felt lighter, as if a small weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

As he left the office, he paused by the piano. He sat down on the bench, his fingers hovering over the keys. Slowly, he began to play a soft, melancholic melody. The notes filled the waiting room, carrying with them his pain, his hope, and the promise of healing. For the first time in a long while, Abim felt a glimmer of peace. He knew that this journey wouldn't be easy, but with the support of his therapist, his friends, and the music that had always been his solace, he felt ready to face whatever lay ahead.

When he finally sat himself at the grand piano in the therapist's clinic, his fingers trembling slightly as they hovered above the keys. The polished black surface gleamed under the soft lights, a silent invitation to release the storm brewing within him. He took a deep breath, feeling the weight of unspoken words and buried emotions pressing against his chest.

As his fingers finally pressed down on the keys, the first notes that emerged were tentative, almost hesitant. But then, like a dam breaking, a torrent of sound poured out, raw and unfiltered. The melody was jagged and discordant, each notes expressed a sharp exhalation of his frustration and pain.

His hands moved with increasing urgency, pounding the keys in a cathartic release. The music filled the room, resonating off the walls and enveloping him in a cocoon of sound. It was a melody full of frustration, each chord heavy with the weight of unexpressed emotions.

Abim's body swayed with the rhythm, his entire being immersed in the act of playing. His face contorted with the intensity of his feelings, his eyes closed as he delved deeper into the music. Memories of his abusive childhood, the absence of his father, how he lost Anin before he could say about his feelings towards her, and the recent traumas that had pushed him to the brink swirled through his mind. Each note was a cry, a scream, a plea for release.

The melody shifted from harsh and erratic to something more flowing, yet still imbued with a deep, aching sorrow. Abim's fingers danced over the keys, their movements fluid and expressive. He was letting go, allowing the music to carry away the anger, the fear, and the hurt that had been buried deep inside his mind for so long.

Tears welled up in his eyes, but he didn't stop playing. He couldn't. The piano had become his voice, articulating what he couldn't put into words. The

emotions he had kept bottled up for years were finally finding an outlet, and with each note, he felt a fraction of the burden lift.

Dr. Sekar watched from the doorway to her room, heart aching for the young man who was pouring all of his soul into the music. She could see the transformation happening before her eyes—Abim was not just playing the piano; he was engaging in a profound act of self-healing.

As the final notes lingered in the air, Abim's hands slowly came to rest on his lap. He sat there for a moment, breathing heavily, his body trembling from the emotional exertion. The room was silent except for the faint echo of the last chord, a poignant reminder of the catharsis that had just occurred. He opened his eyes, his vision blurred with tears. He felt drained, yet strangely lighter, as if he had shed a layer of the darkness that had been suffocating him. The piano had once again become his refuge, a place where he could confront and release the demons that haunted him.

Dr. Sekar approached him, her expression gentle and understanding. “That was powerful, Abim,” she said softly. “How do you feel?”

He took a shaky breath, wiping the tears from his face. “Sorry, I was too distracted,” he admitted, his voice raw. “Like I finally let go of something that’s been eating away at me.”

She nodded, placing a reassuring hand on his shoulder. “Music has a way of reaching the parts of us that words can’t. Remember, you’re not alone in this.

We'll work through it together," with smile, she stroked his back slowly to soothe him.

Abim looked up at her, gratitude shining through his tear-streaked face. For the first time in a long while, he felt a glimmer of hope. The journey ahead would be difficult, but with the support of his therapist, his friends, and the healing power of music, he believed he could find his way to a place of peace and acceptance.

As Mahesa typed something on his laptop (Abim believed it was something that he needed to do for his quizzes), he looked slightly at Abim, who looked exhausted after his first session with the therapist. The soft glow of the laptop screen cast a gentle light on Mahesa's face, highlighting his furrowed brow and the concern in his eyes. He paused for a moment, fingers hovering over the keys, and then he turned his full attention to his friend.

"Hey, how are you holding up?" Mahesa asked softly, closing his laptop and setting it aside. He leaned forward, his expression earnest.

Abim sighed deeply, sinking into the plush couch. He ran a hand through his disheveled hair, still feeling the residual tremors of the emotional release he had experienced. "It's... tiring," he admitted, his voice barely above a whisper. "But it felt good to finally let some of it out."

Mahesa nodded, his eyes never leaving Abim's face. "That's a good start, Abim."

Abim offered a weak smile, appreciating Mahesa's unwavering support. "Thanks, Mahesa. I don't know what I'd do without you," he said. "And, sorry that I always am troubling you," he continued after taking a deep breath

"You don't have to thank me, or even say sorry for that," Mahesa replied, shaking his head. "We're in this together. You've been there for me more times than I can count. It's my turn to be here for you."

They sat in comfortable silence for a few moments, the weight of the day's events hanging between them. The soft hum of the air conditioning and the occasional click of a key from Mahesa's laptop were the only sounds that filled the room.

Finally, Abim broke the silence. "You know, the piano in the therapist's office... it's amazing," he said, his eyes lighting up with a hint of excitement. "I haven't played like that in a long time. It was like all my emotions just poured out through the music."

Mahesa smiled, relieved to see a spark of passion in his friend's eyes. "I'm glad you found a way to express yourself. Music has always been your escape, your way of making sense of things. But, the way you were in those competitions, it seems like it's restraining your creativity," he said worriedly. "Don't you need to

cut down and not attend any competitions ahead? I mean, since you have to heal yourself first?”

Abim nodded, another sigh left his mouth. “I think I’m going to be okay, Mahesa. It’s going to be hard, but with therapy, the piano, and your support... I believe I can get through this,” he said. “Those competitions, I think it’s a tribute to Anin anyway, so I think I’ll cut it and try to heal myself first—Oh, and looking for another piano teacher, maybe?”

Mahesa reached out and placed a reassuring hand on Abim’s shoulder. “Whoa, easy there, buddy. One step at a time, please. We’ll face this together.”

As the evening drew on, they continued to talk, sharing stories and laughter, finding comfort in each other’s presence. Despite the challenges ahead, Abim felt a newfound sense of hope. He knew the road to healing would be long and arduous, but with friends like Mahesa by his side, he was ready to face whatever came his way.

Lara

I think I'm going to go crazy seeing you smile at someone else other than me, and that hurts (BOYNEXTDOOR – Crying)

Abim was struggling with the coffee machine when rain started to fall in the area around the café. Some students began to swarm the café while running to take shelter inside the café, but the sight of a girl standing out without any umbrellas, drenching herself outside the café was quite peculiar for him. He could save the girl, but the growing number of customers inside the café was (really) enough to overwhelm him.

Mahesa saw it all uncovered, starting when Abim kept staring at the girl outside the café. He started to be bothered (but his hands were still going strong while operating the coffee machine), and finally, he scratched himself when he was doing the last order. As the son of the café owner, Mahesa was still in his right mind not to let Abim be more distracted than ever, so he stopped him (he was trying to make a new menu if he had nothing to do during his work hours) and told him to get the girl inside (the girl started to look paler now).

Abim dragged the girl inside to bring her to the employee-only room, not even a minute later. Mahesa opened the café door with a face full of sweet smiles, and they let her warm herself up inside the employee-only room.

Lara was surprised when the barista invited him to the café to take shelter. She initially rejected it, but the barista finally (forcibly) dragged her inside and

bribed her with her favourite hot lemon tea (she didn't specifically ask for it; the barista offered it to her without him knowing her preferences).

She was still in her right mind to accept a pair of dry clothes and a big towel from the barista, then let him go outside the room so that she could change her clothes—she wasn't sure who owned the clothes, but at least the clothes was enough for her to wear for a while as her clothes were completely drenched from the rain.

"I'll be back in five with the lemon tea," he said before completely vanishing from her sight, letting her have some privacy in the room.

Lara felt bad for dampening the room with her current condition (she felt like a cat that fell into the ditch) and brushed off all the evil thoughts that flocked his head uncontrollably before she started to change the clothes. She knew she wasn't in her right mind when she stood outside the café before the rain got heavier. Still, she was forced to be stuck in a shitty situation where her eyes caught a glimpse of two people fighting for dominance in a kiss through the opened window of a house just across the café. Lara was too immersed in that scene until she couldn't feel herself getting drenched more, and the barista dragged her to take shelter inside the café. She should be thankful that someone cared for her in that situation, rather than being left alone in the middle of the road watching that goddamn adult scene right in front of her salad.

Someone knocked on the door softly, and Lara let them in. A middle-aged woman stood before the door with a face full of worries, and then she immediately hugged Lara after putting a glass of lemon tea (still smoky from the hot water used

to make it) onto a bar table. Lara stood there in shock, water still dripping from her clothes (she hadn't changed her clothes. Instead, she wrapped herself to look like a burrito using the big towel the barista gave him earlier). Her thoughts were still occupied by that goddamn adult scene she had seen before, and she was sure she wouldn't forget that easily.

She condemned all of the sweet things that dimwit Rian said to her, fuck all those girls who wanted to be with him and fuck Lara, that let herself be entrapped into those sweet words. Because of that spawn of satan, Lara got caught in a peculiar situation where the woman owner of the café, her barista and another boy tried to comfort her. At the same time, her mind was busy with many 'why' questions inside, making her feel guilty about what they were trying to do to comfort her.

Abim, Mahesa, and the middle-aged woman whom Mahesa called Mom were running out of ideas to comfort the girl sitting in the employee-only room. Three of them sighed in defeat, letting her do what she wanted while ensuring she was warmed up in the room. They also needed to continue their work in the café without any disturbance, so they just left her like that inside the employee-only room.

Abim gave her Mahesa's clothes earlier because he wanted her to change them as she was severely drenched. Still, now those clothes were lying pathetically on the dry side of the sofa, far from the wet area she had created when she entered the room. Abim had no problem with her choice, but he was worried that the girl could catch a cold after being in the rain (that wasn't classy of her, judging by her

posh look). Maybe, just maybe, for once, Abim needed to understand something because *everything happened for a reason*, and Abim was willing to hear whatever story might come out of her mouth after she sobered herself up. At least Abim was able to save someone today.

“Thanks for the lemon tea,” was the only word coming out of her mouth when she came out of the employee-only room, hands holding tight the emptied glass. Abim was baffled, but Mahesa immediately called his mom. Mahesa received the emptied glass (which only consisted of lemon slices now). At the same time, his mom immediately checked her body temperature to ensure there weren’t any anomalies in her body. Abim, on the other side, adjusted the towel position (it started to show more and more of her drenched body). “I’m going home now, thank you for—” she wasn’t quick enough as her hands were grabbed tightly by Mahesa’s mom.

Inevitably, she got dragged again, and later, she was seated in a warm corner of the café. Mahesa's mom presented her with one more glass of lemon tea, forcing her to wait at least until the rain stopped. She also changed her clothes to keep herself warm and put the drenched ones in the black plastic bag Mahesa gave her.

Lara was the girl's name after a lengthy discussion between them. Nothing was wrong with the name, but Abim’s longing gaze was evident. *Lara was too similar to Anin*; she moved too similar to Anin, who died seven years ago. Abim couldn’t take his eyes off the figure at the café's corner. Lara’s eyes were also fixed

on the pile of instruments in the café, adding points to Anin and Lara's similarity. Abim missed Anin, undoubtedly, but he also knew that Lara wasn't Anin. There was nothing that Abim could do for her except ensure her that the café was warm enough for her to take shelter.

Lara stared again at the house in front of the café, showing two people sitting under the canopy that protected them from the rain while sipping on something from two similar glasses. Another sigh could be heard from Lara when she recognised the figures. It was Rian and one of her close friends. Now, she had decided: 'Lara should break up with that spawn of satan'. Maybe after she arrived at her apartment later, she should just throw some things so she won't think about that son of a bitch anymore. Lara's curse for him wasn't finished yet, and she had plenty of time for that, but for now, she should thank the café owner and her employees who let her crash into the café to take shelter.

Lara did think that she was that pathetic, but thinking about it again, why would she cry for that dimwit who was shamelessly showing PDA with another girl while still in the relationship with Lara. Why would she be depressed when there are other good people like the café owner and her employees? Why would she be sad when she can scream 'I'm okay' loudly and occupy herself with her endless worldly work? As long as she could remember, love couldn't pay her bills anyway.

Lara did realise that the damned relationship won't bring her anywhere—especially with the dickhead Rian's bad attitude towards her lately. Lara didn't need anything; she only needed to understand that her work was draining her energy completely these days, but Rian couldn't understand that, and it made them quarrel

a little bit. Lara knew everything from her friends who thought she had already broken up with him (her friends told her that they saw Rian walking with another girl they recognised as Lara's mortal enemy during her college days the other day). Lara sipped her tea with a sad laugh as she stared outside the café to ensure the rain would stop anytime now.

She lifted the black plastic bag of damp clothes and walked to the cashier. "How much should I pay for the lemon teas? I will return the clothes as soon as I finish washing them. The rain would stop anytime now. Where should I return the clothes?"

Abim's eyes blinked slowly. "No need to pay for the lemon teas—You can go to the café when you want to return Mahesa's hoodie, but are you sure we shouldn't take you home?"

Lara shook her head. "Yeah, thanks—I mean, it's enough. I will return the clothes later. Are you sure I don't need to pay for the lemon teas?"

Both Abim and Mahesa nodded. "I was the one who took you inside, but if you want to pay it, just pay with a sincere smile when you return the hoodie later, please. Your tears weren't worth it to be shed to someone who hurt you badly,"

And Lara tried hard to hide her shock. Was she really in a bad condition until everyone recognised her struggle earlier? "How did you know?" she hissed.

"Sorry if I sound rude, but your longing gaze when you see the house in front of the café, and I just deduced it as those people hurt you badly," Abim explained with a voice full of regrets. "So, give us a sincere smile later; you are worth more than that."

Indeed, Abim could never forget Anin—People around him knew that, and Mahesa noticed ever since they met Lara, Abim became more and more depressed. He thought the emotional roller coaster slightly triggered him. He knew from the melodies Abim created during his free time in the café, eyes locked at the beautiful violin (no one ever touched that, simply because no one who came to the café ever played the violin before, and Abim's the only person who can play the piano, out of the regulars in the café)

Mahesa remembered that Jirendra had called him earlier and that he would visit the café sometime later to hang around, and he hadn't told Abim about that. But as he looked at Abim again, he held himself back from telling him as Abim seemed to be fully immersed in the melody he had created then.

The café regulars weren't saying anything to the sad melody Abim produced. They seemed entirely unfazed by the sad piano tunes, but Mahesa knew the meaning of those melodies. For some people, it may sound pathetic and just that, but for Mahesa, it was a deep frustration caused by losing a mother and deep resentment of losing a lover.

It was Mahesa who brought Abim to the psych wards after he found Abim tried to cut his arms. As a result, he was initially brought to the emergency room as he lost a lot of blood. That was also the first time Mahesa prayed earnestly because he could've lost his friend (and neighbour) for the second time, and he didn't want that to happen. In the past, he had lost his best friend, so he didn't want that to happen the second time.

He was still watching Abim play when it happened again. Abim (again) pressed the wrong key in the middle of the tune, surprising the customers, and cold sweat started dripping from his face. Mahesa ran off his cashier machine to bring Abim to the employee-only room. Abim's body was trembling, his hands felt cold like ice cubes, and Mahesa had to look for something inside Abim's locker. After finding a bottle full of water, he brought that to Abim and let him drink it.

"She has a lot of similarities with Anin; I can't get the image of her from my head," Abim said after he calmed himself down. "I've never met someone who resembles her, and when I met Lara earlier, she felt too familiar, but she has no memory of me."

Mahesa sighed in defeat. "And you messed up your play again today. Was that one of the side effects your psychiatrist said last time?"

Abim nodded, eyes avoiding Mahesa's while scanning the bottle in his hand. "Thanks again, I guess?"

"No problems. Anyway, I'm closing soon. Jirendra will come too, so change your clothes, and the three of us can walk together back home,"

"We need to break up," she said quickly after someone on the other line answered. Angry noises could be heard from the phone, but Lara was utterly unfazed by whatever curse words she heard. "You need to take all your things from my apartment and don't call me 'baby' anymore. We're breaking up."

Someone (literally) barked into the phone, and Lara scoffed. "Didn't I say we need to break up? Don't bother me again," and she hung up just like that.

She wasn't kidding when she said she wanted to discard everything that could remind her of him. After putting all those things into a big box, Lara found a strip of photos she had taken while going on a date with Rian in the far corner of her cupboard. She wanted to get out of the relationship, but she thought cutting him off wouldn't be easy. Her left hand crumpled the photos while laughing miserably, causing her to sniffle.

The apartment was eerily quiet, save for the faint hum of the refrigerator and the distant sounds of the city outside. She stood in the middle of the living room, her eyes scanning the space that once felt warm and comforting, now filled with painful reminders of betrayal.

Determined to purge the memories, she took a deep breath and rolled up her sleeves, ready to cleanse her life of the remnants of Rian. She first reached the framed photograph on the mantelpiece—a four-cut picture of them, laughing and carefree. Her fingers trembled slightly as she pulled it from its place, her gaze lingering on the smiling faces for a moment before she set it down forcefully on the coffee table.

Next, she turned her attention to the bookshelves. Each shelf was filled with novels they had discussed, travel guides to places they had planned to visit together. She grabbed a stack of his favourite books, the ones he had insisted on bringing over, and tossed them into a box with a bitter resolve. With each book removed, she felt a small weight lift from her shoulders, but the heaviness in her heart remained.

Finally, she moved to the sofa where they used to share their thought together. The mugs they had bought together on the table in front of the sofa, the ones with matching patterns, seemed to mock her now. She picked them up and placed them in a box with the rest of his things, her resolve hardening with each item removed.

When she was done, she stood in the middle of the now-tidier apartment, breathing heavily from the exertion and the emotional toll. The space looked different—emptier, yet somehow lighter. She felt a flicker of relief but also an overwhelming wave of sadness. It was as if she had exorcised a ghost, but the scars of the haunting remained.

Taking one last look around, Lara sank onto the couch, exhausted. The apartment was free of his things, but her mind was still cluttered with memories. She knew it would take time to heal, but this was a start. As she closed her eyes and leaned back, she promised herself she would fill the empty spaces with new memories, ones that were hers alone, untouched by betrayal.

After a few days, she finished tidying up her apartment and cleaning the hoodie she borrowed from that barista in the café. Rian did come to her apartment two days ago, and he was agitated since he still wanted to be with Lara. It was hard for Lara, as she got slapped by him after a few minutes, but Rian still took all of the things Lara gave to him before leaving her apartment. Soon, after putting the hoodie in a paper bag and changing her clothes, she was ready to go to the café to enjoy

the calming ambience of the café she wasn't paying attention to as she was too immersed in looking at Rian.

She walked to the café, as it wasn't that far from her apartment. When she reached the café, the cashier boy (was his name Mahesa?) immediately greeted her. "Good eve—Oh, hi, how can I help you today?"

Lara smiled. "The hoodie. Then, can you please make another lemon tea for me? Give me the iced one for today," she handed out the paper bag she was carrying to the cashier, smiling, never leaving her face as the cashier operated the café's computer to proceed with Lara's order.

"Anything else?"

"Well, could you recommend something to snack on for me? Can I do my work here?" Lara asked.

"Is french fries enough?" Mahesa asked. "Or you could try the platter if you want. And yes, you can do your work. The working space's there," and he pointed to the room with the 'no smoking' sign.

"Platter it is—How much do I owe you?"

"Well, the total's 58 thousand, paying with card or cash?" Mahesa asked, and Lara just handed a card to him. As he proceeded her payment, Mahesa said, "You don't look gloomy anymore."

"Thanks to whoever said that I should break up with that spawn of satan. I didn't go through a major depression, and yeah, we broke up," she explained to Mahesa. "I don't know what would have happened when you guys weren't trying

to save me that day— I mean, I could've been dying, but, yeah, thanks, guys, for saving me.”

“Glad you feel like that—you’ll be in the working space, then?” Mahesa asked. A smile started to bloom on his face as Lara received her card and receipt with a nod. “He’ll bring the food and drink later on, by the way,” Mahesa continued while inclining his head toward Abim, who was focusing on the coffee machine. “He’s making a new menu,” he whispered, and Lara chuckled.

“Yea, thanks again,” with a chuckle, Lara moved towards the working space Mahesa pointed to earlier.

The café is a pretty good working space. She didn’t notice that last time. Nestled on a bustling street corner, the cafe buzzes with an undercurrent of focused energy. As you step inside, the aroma of freshly brewed coffee mingles with the faint hum of quiet conversations and the soft clacking of keyboards. The interior is a harmonious blend of modern design and cosy comfort, creating an inviting atmosphere for work and relaxation.

The main area of the cafe is spacious, with high ceilings that allow natural light to flood in through large, floor-to-ceiling windows. The walls are adorned with local artwork and inspirational quotes, giving the space a vibrant yet professional feel. Scattered throughout are various seating options designed to cater to different preferences and needs.

Near the entrance, there are plush armchairs and low coffee tables, perfect for casual meetings or a quick coffee break. As Lara moves further in, you’ll find

rows of sturdy wooden tables and ergonomic chairs arranged in a grid-like pattern, each equipped with multiple plug sockets to accommodate laptops, chargers, and other electronic devices. The tables are generously spaced to ensure privacy and minimise distractions, fostering an environment conducive to productivity.

In the heart of the cafe, a beautiful grand piano sits invitingly, its polished surface gleaming under the ambient lighting. Nearby, a glass display case showcases a beautifully crafted violin, adding an artistic and musical touch to the space. These instruments serve as decorative pieces, symbolising the cafe's appreciation for art and creativity.

The seating arrangement is designed to cater to various needs and preferences. Near the entrance are comfortable armchairs and small coffee tables, perfect for casual meetings or a quick coffee break. Moving further into the cafe, you'll find long communal tables ideal for group work and collaboration. Each table has many plug sockets, ensuring that every seat has easy access to power for laptops, chargers, and other electronic devices.

To the right, a dedicated coworking area is partitioned by sleek glass walls, offering a quieter space for focused work. This area features ergonomic chairs, spacious desks, and additional amenities like whiteboards and a projector for presentations. Private booths line the back wall, each furnished with plug sockets and adjustable lighting, providing a personalised, distraction-free workspace.

Lara checked the internet connection as she sat on one of the sofas. This cafe also boasts a high-speed Wi-Fi connection, with routers strategically placed to

ensure robust and consistent coverage throughout the space. The skilled and friendly barista prepares each order with precision and care, contributing to the cafe's reputation as a top spot for quality beverages and a productive work environment.

Overall, this cafe, with its multitude of plug sockets and designated coworking space, strikes the perfect balance between a functional workspace and a relaxing haven, catering to the needs of modern professionals and students alike. Lara gasped when she finally scanned the whole café, as it was a too-good-to-be-true café that she accidentally found one day. Not to mention, the fantastic owner of the café, the cashier, and the barista who helped her that day. However, one thing bugged her when she noticed the piano and the violin. As she prepared her working devices on the table, she saw the barista walking towards her with a glass full of iced lemon tea and a good amount of fried snacks on a plate.

“You’re back, and I’m glad you’re doing okay,” Abim told her. Here’s the lemon tea and the platter. I hope you enjoy your stay here,” he continued as he gave her all the things she had ordered.

Can’t contain her curiosity, she opened her mouth and said, “Who plays the piano here, and why is the violin locked there?”

Abim’s body stiffened. He was about to say something, but he gulped his saliva and said, “I play the piano, and the violin was someone else’s.”

Lara looked at him in amazement. “That’s cool! Okay, I will stay here until you play the piano!” she chirped with a wide smile.

Abim, however, was stunned.

After finishing all the orders, Abim, who had nothing to do, walked to the piano and opened the fallboard. Sitting on the stool, he was thinking about playing some known songs. But then he looked at Lara, who was now looking at him interestingly. He sighed and placed his hands on the keys.

In the dimly lit café, the soft murmur of conversation fades into the background as a piano's gentle, melancholic notes begin to fill the air. Seated at the grand piano, Abim plays with a quiet intensity, his fingers gliding over the keys with a mixture of grace and sorrow. His eyes are closed, brows furrowed slightly as if each note pulls him deeper into a well of bittersweet memories.

His posture is one of both strength and vulnerability. With his shoulders slightly hunched, he leans into the instrument as though seeking solace within its embrace. The melody he plays is his composition, a hauntingly beautiful piece that speaks of loss and longing. Each chord resonates with emotion, the sound weaving through the air like a poignant, unspoken story.

As the music flows, Abim’s expression reveals the depth of his grief. His face, illuminated by the soft glow of a nearby lamp, is etched with pain and remembrance. His lips occasionally quiver, hinting at the tears he holds back. The

sadness in his playing is palpable, with each note symbolising a tear he can't shed, and each pause defines a silent sob.

The audience in the café senses the weight of his sorrow, their conversations hushed, eyes drawn to Abim's poignant performance. They can feel that this is more than just a piece of music—it is a cathartic release, a way for him to keep alive the memory of someone dearly missed.

His thoughts drift to the person he lost, her face appearing vividly in his mind with each key he presses. He remembers Anin's laughter and voice and how Anin used to listen to him play. The sadness in the melody reflects the void left behind, a space that can never be filled. Yet, in this moment of music, they seem closer, their memory intertwining with the melody he creates.

As the composition reaches its most sorrowful climax, a single tear escapes his closed eyelids, trailing down his cheek. He doesn't wipe it away; instead, he lets it fall, a testament to the love and loss that inspire his playing. The final notes linger in the air, a poignant echo of a story told without words.

The café remains silent for a moment after the music stops, the weight of the performance settling over everyone. Abim slowly opens his eyes, his gaze distant and filled with the afterglow of his emotional journey. He sits there quietly, hands resting on the keys, as if reluctant to break the connection to the memory he just revisited through his music.

As the music flowed, something within Lara shifted. The piano's melancholy notes seemed to wrap around her heart, squeezing gently at first, then with increasing intensity. She had been holding herself together all day, keeping her emotions neatly boxed up, but the sadness in the pianist's composition unlocked something deep inside her.

Her eyes, which had been dry and indifferent moments before, began to glisten with unshed tears. She watched the pianist's fingers glide over the keys, each touch bringing forth a sound that resonated with her own suppressed pain. It was as if the music was telling her own story of loss and longing, which she had tried so hard to forget.

As the melody reached its sorrowful climax, she felt a pang of hurt, sharp and sudden, like a dagger to the heart. Memories she had buried began to surface: the laughter and joy of those dates she went, followed by the crushing grief of their absence and Rian's betrayal. The music seemed to speak directly to her soul, voicing the anguish she could not put into words.

She clutched the table's edge, knuckles whitening as she tried to steady herself. The once soothing ambience of the café now felt overwhelming, the weight of her emotions pressing down on her. She felt a tear escape and roll down her cheek, followed by another, and then another, until she could no longer hold back the flood.

Her breath hitched, and she turned her face slightly, hoping to hide her vulnerability from the other café visitor. But the sadness was too profound, too raw.

It felt like the pianist's sorrow had reached across the room and melded with her own, creating a symphony of shared grief.

When the music finally ceased, the silence that followed was almost unbearable. She felt exposed as if the music had stripped away her defences, leaving her heart laid bare. The tears continued to fall, silently marking the pain she had been carrying for so long.

In the wake of the music, she remained seated, staring blankly at her untouched tea. The emotions stirred by the piano's sad melody lingered, a heavy ache in her chest. She felt an overwhelming need to escape, to find a place where she could release the pain that had been unearthed.

The music opened a wound she thought had healed, but perhaps she realised it was a necessary pain. Only by confronting her grief could she hope to move forward, carrying the memory of the betrayal of her once loved one not as a burden but as a cherished part of her heart.

Mahesa watched it all from when Abim started to play the piano with sorrowful notes to when Lara broke down silently in the corner of the working space. It seems like two of them shared the same pain of losing their loved ones, although with different stories. Abim with his pain of losing Anin, and Lara with her pain of being betrayed by someone she trusted with her heart. He knew Abim would try to

calm himself down by sitting on the piano stool, so he chose to bring himself towards Lara, who sniffled uncontrollably while bringing a box of tissues.

“Tissue?” he offered when he finally stood beside Lara. “Can I sit?”

Lara, receiving the tissue from Mahesa, moved her butt slightly to give some space for Mahesa to sit beside her. “Thanks for the tissues.”

Mahesa just sat there in silence, hand still holding the tissue box in front of Lara. Their mind was still occupied by the sorrowful melodies from Abim’s piano play earlier, and no one dared to erase those melodies from their head.

After a few minutes, Mahesa broke the silence by saying, “He’s an amazing pianist, don’t you think?”

Lara turned her head to Mahesa, now smiling sadly at Abim. Abim still sat on the stool, refusing to get up. Luckily enough for them, no customer came for a while, so Mahesa just let Abim be. “What do you mean by that?”

Mahesa hesitated briefly before asking, “Do you know about the violinist Anindya Kusuma?” Lara’s eyes widened before she nodded frantically. Mahesa continued talking, and after some time, he finally revealed, “And that violin over there was Anin’s; her parents gave it to us to display at the café when we first opened. And for the piano, it was the piano Abim used to play in the past. He changed his piano recently, and he brought that big ass piano here for him to play in his free time.”

Lara removed the snot from her nose using the tissue. “And why do Anin’s parents give y’all the violin? It could’ve acted as a cool memento to keep in their house,” she sniffled.

“Do you know who Abim is actually?” Mahesa answered with another question, which Lara shook her head at. “He’s Abimana Raharja. Three of us were schoolmates in the past. He was reminded of Anin when he saw you because you have a similar feature to her,” he smiled.

Lara gasped in surprise. It was a new fact she learned today. The barista was the famous Abimana Raharja, with Anindya’s violin displayed at the café, and the cashier was their schoolmates.

The new fact she'd just heard was unexpected, almost surreal. For a moment, she sat frozen, and she felt like the room around her was fading into a blur. Her heart began to race, each beat echoing loudly in her ears. Lara completely ignored the work she had been working on earlier. A mix of emotions played across her face—shock, disbelief, and a tinge of excitement. Her free hand moved to cover her mouth, her fingers trembling as they touched her lips. She felt a sudden rush of warmth spreading from her chest, a flush creeping up her neck and colouring her cheeks. The surprise was so overwhelming that she almost felt lightheaded, her mind struggling to process the new information.

Mahesa chuckled before he nudged her. “Close your mouth, I’ll get back to the cashier, you still need these tissues?” and after a confirming nod from Lara, Mahesa gave her the tissue box and walked away.

Lara stayed at the café until there weren't that crowded. It was almost midnight, and during that time, Lara kept ordering iced lemon teas. She was waiting to ask them whether they wanted to help her with the next project. Lara had given it a lot of thought and thought Abim was perfect for her next project; that's why she asked Mahesa if she could stay for the rest of the day and then talk to Abim before Mahesa closed the café.

"Mahesa said you want to talk to me," Abim approached, his apron still intact. He wiped his dirty hands before putting his butt to a chair he took near the sofa where Lara still doing her work.

"Yeah, your piano play earlier was too emotional, I got sucked into those emotions when you played it—What song was that, anyway? I had never heard of such composition before,"

His eyes hazed, and he closed his eyes before speaking to Lara. "I composed it myself two years ago for someone."

Lara opened her mouth, but nothing came out of her, and Abim seemed to be lost in his thoughts. She didn't know what he was thinking about, but she was sure it was something unharmed for her. She then chose to stare outside, where she could see the damned house Rian and that bitch used to play behind her back.

She did choose to bury her memories with that spawn of satan, but when she looked at Abim, she knew that this was her only chance to ask him about the

thing inside her mind. “I might have to need your help,” she said after contemplating for a while. Abim looked at her, interested in what she wanted to say, while Lara just gave him her phone. “I wrote to remove bad thoughts from my mind. The song you played earlier clicked inside my head with the story I currently writing about, would you help me to finish it?”

Abim hesitated. That was the first time he received this kind of offer from someone. He was someone who got out from a psychiatric ward. When people know about the fact after knowing him for a while, they started to stay away from him, afraid that Abim would hurt them in many ways possible. He almost refused the offer, but as he looked back at Lara (who now showed him her puppy eyes full of determination) he sighed and, “Okay,” in a very small voice.

Lara returned to the café the next day, ready to work on her project with Abim. She was greeted by Mahesa and his mom, but there was no sign of Abim in the café. Knowing what Lara wanted to do, Mahesa clicked his head towards the back of the café. “Go to the back, there’s another space at the back. Just pass by the garden, and Abim will be there,” he smiled. “Oh, do you want another iced lemon tea?”

Lara shook her head, and after greeting the woman who was busy preparing the cakes in the display, she headed to the back of the café.

Nestled behind the bustling facade of the quaint café, there lay a hidden treasure that few knew about—a beautiful backyard garden that was strictly off-limits to patrons. Shielded by a tall, ivy-covered stone wall, the garden was a sanctuary of tranquillity and natural beauty, untouched by the outside world.

As Lara approached the garden, the scent of blooming flowers wafted through the air, a tantalising hint of the vibrant life that lay beyond the gate. The iron gate itself was a work of art, intricately designed with twisting vines and delicate leaves, locked with a sturdy brass padlock that glinted in the sunlight.

Peering through the gaps in the gate, one could catch glimpses of the garden's enchanting landscape. A cobblestone path meandered through lush greenery, bordered by beds of colourful flowers in full bloom. Roses of every hue—crimson, ivory, and blush—climbed gracefully over trellises, their petals soft and fragrant. Lavender bushes added a splash of purple, their blossoms attracting butterflies that flitted about in a mesmerising dance.

In the centre of the garden, a small pond mirrored the azure sky above, its surface dotted with delicate water lilies. The gentle sound of trickling water came from a stone fountain, its basin adorned with moss and lichen, lending an air of timeless elegance. The fountain's centrepiece was a statue of a cherubic figure, water pouring from an urn held in its hands.

A wooden pergola stood nearby, draped in wisteria vines that cascaded down like nature's chandelier. Beneath it, a wrought-iron bench invited quiet

contemplation, its seat cushioned by soft moss. Sunlight filtered through the canopy of leaves, casting dappled shadows that danced with the breeze.

Majestic oak and maple trees bordered the garden, their branches forming a natural barrier that shielded the space from prying eyes. Birds nested in their boughs, filling the air with sweet, melodic songs that blended harmoniously with the gentle rustle of leaves.

The garden was a testament to meticulous care and a deep love for nature. Each plant was pruned to perfection, each flowerbed weeded and mulched with precision. Yet, it remained a secret haven, reserved for the café's owners and their cherished moments of solitude. The few who had caught a glimpse of the garden spoke of its ethereal beauty in hushed tones, respecting the sanctity of its privacy.

For those on the outside, the garden remained a tantalising mystery, a hidden paradise that added an air of allure to the cosy café. Its beauty, though unseen by many, was a silent promise of peace and a reminder of the wonders that nature, tended with care and devotion, could bestow. And there, at the pond, she could see a slender body of Abim, hands busy picking up fish pellets from his hands. She walked to the pond then crouched down beside Abim.

Abim, unfazed with whatever antics Lara would do, still busy giving food to the fishes that lived in the pond, with a simple "Good morning," said to Lara.

“The garden’s cool, why didn’t you guys opened this space for the public to go? Mahesa said this area was off-limit for the others,” Lara said, eyes scanning whatever it is in the pond.

Abim smiled before he pointed to one corner, where several succulents growing inside tiny pots placed on a shelf. “Those are Mahesa’s and he doesn’t want those to die so we had to make this area off-limit for him to take care of the plants and the fishes,” he explained. “I had a long thought last night about your offer, and I decided to help you with that,” he clapped his hands after he’s finished with the pellets to clean it.

“Really? You aren’t forcing yourself to accept my offer, right?” Lara interrogated him, and when she saw Abim shook his head, she smiled widely. “Okay! So here’s the plan—”

UNIVERSITAS ***

Mahesa stood behind the cash register, meticulously counting out change for a customer. The mid-afternoon lull had settled over the café, casting a peaceful ambiance over the room. Sunlight filtered through the large windows, casting warm patterns on the wooden floors. The aroma of freshly brewed coffee mingled with the faint scent of pastries, creating a comforting atmosphere.

The bell above the door jingled softly, and Mahesa looked up to see the familiar face of Lara approaching. With a friendly smile, she handed him a small, neatly wrapped package. "Where’s Abim?" she said warmly.

"Well, he's at the employee room," Mahesa replied, accepting the package with a nod. He placed it on the counter, curiosity piqued by its weight and the feel of a hardcover through the wrapping paper. "What's inside?" Mahesa asked.

"Open it, you're free to do that anyway," Lara replied. "And, uh, another glass of iced lemon tea, please," she said, handing him her card. After fiddling with the cash register, he handed Lara her receipt before turning his head again to the package Lara gave earlier. Carefully, he untied the string and peeled back the paper, revealing a beautifully bound book with an intricately designed cover.

As Mahesa admired the book, a note slipped out from between the pages and fluttered onto the counter. He picked it up, reading the brief but heartfelt message that accompanied the book. A thoughtful expression crossed his face as he realised this was meant for Abim, the barista who had been a constant source of support and camaraderie for Lara.

Mahesa glanced around the café and spotted Abim getting out of the employee room. With a smile, Mahesa made his way over to Abim, the book tucked securely under his arm. "Hey, Abim," Mahesa called out, catching his friend's attention. Abim looked up, his eyes curious. "Got something for you."

Mahesa handed over the book, and Abim's eyes widened in surprise. He carefully took the book, his fingers tracing the embossed cover with appreciation. "From Lara?" he asked, looking up at Mahesa with a mix of gratitude and curiosity.

"Yea, she just came," Mahesa said, his voice warm. "There's a note inside too. I think you'll find it meaningful."

Abim opened the book to the first page, where the note had fallen from. He picked up the note and read it silently, his expression softening as he absorbed the words. A small, genuine smile spread across his face, and he looked back up at Mahesa.

"Thank you, Mahesa," Abim said sincerely, his eyes reflecting a deep sense of gratitude.

"You're welcome, Abim. I hope it brings you some comfort," Mahesa replied, returning the smile.

The two friends stood there for a moment, the book a silent testament to their bond. The café, with its cosy ambiance and the gentle hum of background noise, felt like a sanctuary—a place where small gestures of kindness could provide solace and strength. As Mahesa returned to his post at the register, he felt a sense of fulfilment, knowing that he had brightened Abim's day in a meaningful way.

Abim, on the other side, walked back to the employee room to keep the book safe. He will make sure to read the book after work later, to enjoy the words crocheted by Lara that was inspired by his piano play.

Abim never gave the titles to his compositions, but Lara gave them beautiful names for each melody he weaved. He had just reached his house when he remembered the book Lara had given him earlier. Curiosity haunted him, he wanted to read the book as soon as possible, so he washed himself up before he threw himself to the bean bag at his room.

Lara gave it a title of *Melodies of the Heart*, and it was an exquisite anthology that seamlessly wove together the emotive power of words and the evocative beauty of music. Bound in deep blue leather with intricate gold leaf embossing, the cover featured an elegant treble clef entwined with floral motifs, symbolising the harmonious blend of music and literature within its pages.

Inside, the book was a masterpiece of artistic collaboration. Each chapter was dedicated to one of Abim's compositions, with the song's title and a few musical notes gracing the top of the first page of each section. Lara had meticulously crafted short narratives inspired by the melodies and themes of Abim's music, capturing the essence of each song in her lyrical prose.

The first chapter, *Whispers in the Rain*, began with a delicate piano prelude that seemed to echo through the written words. Lara's prose painted a vivid picture of a rainy evening, where emotions ran deep and memories were stirred. The narrative followed a character finding solace and clarity amid the downpour, much like how Abim's gentle composition had captured the bittersweet beauty of a rainy day.

In another chapter, one of his music's haunting melody was mirrored in a poignant tale of love and loss. Lara's words delicately unravelled a story of two lovers separated by time, their connection enduring through the echoes of their shared past. The prose was rich with emotion, resonating with the same depth and melancholy that Abim's notes conveyed.

Another chapter offered a lighter, more whimsical tone. The chapter opened with a bright, lively piece by Abim, and Lara's accompanying story followed suit with a narrative filled with hope and joy. It depicted a carefree day in the life of a child, capturing the innocence and wonder that Abim's music so effortlessly evoked.

Throughout the book, Lara's writing style was as varied as Abim's compositions. She skillfully adapted her voice to match the mood of each song, whether it was the sombre reflection in one of the chapter called *Midnight Reverie* or the passionate intensity of desire in the *Flames of Desire* part. Each chapter felt like a seamless extension of Abim's musical expression, transforming notes and rhythms into vivid imagery and heartfelt stories.

His vision began to blur as tears welled up in his eyes. He tried to blink them away, but the overwhelming tide of emotions was unstoppable. Abim's breath hitched, and a single tear escaped, trailing down his cheek. He quickly wiped it away with the back of his hand, but more followed, breaking free with each word he read.

The book's design also included visual elements that enhanced the reading experience. Each chapter was adorned with delicate illustrations that mirrored the themes and emotions of the music and prose. The illustrations were rendered in soft, flowing lines, adding a visual poetry that complemented both Lara's words and Abim's melodies.

Melodies of the Heart by Lara was more than just a book; it was a symphony of art forms, a testament to the profound connection between music and literature. It was a heartfelt tribute to Abim's talent, capturing the spirit of his compositions and giving them a new dimension through the power of storytelling. Each page invited readers to not only read but also listen and feel, making it a truly immersive and unforgettable experience.

As he turned another page, Abim felt a familiar ache in his chest. Anin's absence had left a void in his life that no amount of music or words could fill. He could still remember the way she used to play her violin, the weird yet delicate bowing that breathed life into every note. Her music had a unique ability to complement his piano compositions, creating a harmony that felt like magic. He slightly lowered the book, covering his face with his hands as the tears flowed freely. His shoulders shook with silent sobs, and he felt a profound release with each tear that fell. It was as if Lara's words had unlocked a part of him that he had kept hidden for so long, allowing him to confront the pain and beauty of his own feelings.

He took a deep breath, trying to steady himself, and glanced back at the book. Lara's book had reignited the memories he had tried to bury, and now they

flooded back with a bittersweet intensity. Anin's weird violin play had been more than just music to him; it had been a source of comfort, a reminder that he wasn't alone. Her absence was a constant reminder of the void left in his life. The ink seemed to dance on the page, weaving a tapestry of emotions that mirrored his own. Abim felt a deep sense of connection to Lara, grateful for her ability to translate his music into such evocative and healing words.

In the silence, Abim could almost hear the echo of Anin's violin, a haunting melody that seemed to whisper promises of what once was and what could have been. The memories were both a comfort and a curse, a reminder of the love and loss intertwined with his music. And as he sat there, missing Anin more than ever, he knew that her presence would forever be a part of his compositions, a silent partner in the symphony of his life. Abim knew that he would carry this moment with him forever, a reminder of the beauty and depth that could be found in both music and words, and the profound impact they could have on a person's soul.

April Fools

Trigger warning

This content contains descriptions of severe mental health struggles and abusive parents. Reader discretion is advised. Call 119 ext 8 (SEJIWA) for Mental Health Assistance. For any abusive behaviour towards kids and women, call 112 or through LAKSA app.

A single love was born among the hundreds of millions of lights, but we were still both innocent childrens. You smiled like the sky after rain and it brightens up my heart. As I smile, we rushing through the passing seasons, seeing our own tomorrows (7!! – Orange)

The first time Abim met Anin was when he was dragged (involuntarily) to a violin competition with Jirendra. That time, he saw Anindya Kusuma, who was just there to try to win over her competitors instead of trying to win over his piano accompanist. Abim changed his impressions when he saw the proud smile on Mahesa's face. Although he knew it was a strange play, Abim realised that the violinist was different.

Mahesa introduced Anin to both Jirendra and Abim as one of his classmate. This is the fact that surprised Jirendra and Abim, making their jaw drop significantly as they learnt about the existence of Anindya Kusuma in their school. It was nearly impossible for Anin to go to school every day, so the school gave her preferential treatment and let her be homeschooled for the time being. She came to

the school sometimes to enjoy her day as a typical student. But yes, most of the time, she will be homeschooled because of the unspoken reason.

If Mahesa wants to go to Abim's house, he just needs to cross the road. That's why Mahesa knew everything about Abim and his family. He was one of the people who regularly attended Abim's piano recitals and competitions to show some support to him (specifically to enjoy the gentle piano played by Abim). Mahesa also knows when Abim usually plays his piano, and then he prepares himself to sleep afterwards, accompanied by the lullaby from Abim's play.

But there was one thing that bothered Mahesa. Not only once or twice did Mahesa hear a scream (like a banshee's scream, if he could say) from Abim's parents' house. Almost every day, when Abim started to play the piano, that scream would be heard evidently, disturbing Mahesa's eardrums as he tried to sleep. Mahesa didn't care about it, as he thought it was Abim's *privacy*, so he didn't tell anyone about it, including Abim himself. He knew Abim's mind was fully occupied, and he didn't want to increase his burden, too.

About five years ago, those screams and Abim's piano play stopped. No more night lullabies to accompany Mahesa to sleep, no more angry screams from Abim's parents' house, and Abim's father started to be away from there more often, resulting in Mahesa's parents partly adopting him as a son as he was too young to be alone. Once again, Mahesa did not complain because he was too happy. After all, Abim would be there with him almost all the time.

Mahesa once told Anin about Abim the piano prodigy. Since then, Anin has wanted to meet Abim so much that she wants to play a duet with him in a competition. Not only that, Mahesa was excited to tell about Abim's story, making Anin's desire to play a duet with Abim grow bigger. And when Mahesa heard about it, he clapped enthusiastically, with "Good idea! It's been five years since I last heard his piano play!"

Of course, Anin needed clarification. Mahesa clearly said that Abim is a piano prodigy, but five years since his last play? "Five years?"

Realising something, Mahesa immediately shut his mouth. "Forget about it, please," he asked. "Don't let Abim know that slipped out of my mouth," he said, smiling nervously.

Anin pouted cutely while Mahesa kept yapping about Abim this and Abim that. "Erm, do you still want Abim to play the piano?" she chirps suddenly, stopping Mahesa's yapping.

"Eh?"

Now fully concentrated on the phone she held, Anin ignored Mahesa completely. Then, Mahesa became interested in what Anin was trying to look for. After Anin finally found it, she showed it to Mahesa.

"International Music Competition?" Mahesa asked confusedly.

And Anin nodded. "Two years ago, I was in this competition for the violin category. Last year was for the vocal category, and this year, it's for the piano," she chirped.

Maheśa just gave her a conflicted look. “Is that competition worth the *comeback of Abimana Raharja*? If I wasn’t mistaken, this was one of the most prestigious competitions in our country. You do realise that, right, as a musician yourself?”

“He can just do the regional—he doesn’t need to be in the finals. At least he’s playing the piano again,” Anin smiled. “He was a piano prodigy, you said it yourself,”

“People would bash him if he didn’t get into the finals, but will you come to school tomorrow?” Maheśa asked quickly, and with a nod from Anin, he continued. “So,—”

Abim was finishing his biology notes when the class door burst and Anin’s loud voice started to invade his eardrums during the break. “You’re coming to school today,” Abim said in both a fascinated and surprised voice, his hands busily tidying up the stationery and books scattered on his desk.

Anin smiled mysteriously, hands pulling the chair on the desk before Abim’s. Pulling another chair, Maheśa followed Anin’s steps, and two of them annoyingly sat simultaneously. Just one second later, Anin and Maheśa stared at each other, and with a mischievous smile, they gave Abim a piece of paper together (in an annoying manner).

“International Music Competition?” after skimming the paper’s content, Abim was confused. With a nod from two people in front of him, Abim continued skimming, and two of them just kept smiling obnoxiously.

“You NEVER tell me you play the piano,”

Another amazed voice joined from the window beside Abim. It was Jirendra—he just made Anin jump in shock (Jirendra’s head popped up suddenly into class through the window) and glared at him sternly. “Don’t surprise me!” she protested.

Jirendra grinned, then stared back at Abim (who was still frozen at his place with eyes reading the whole content of the paper). “Seriously, you never tell me about it—For this year, they are doing the piano, right?”

“Last time I played the piano was five years ago,” Abim was forcing a slight smile. “Thank you for the information, Nin, but I don’t think I can play the piano again,”

And Anin pouted. “Nope. You have to do this! I never saw you play! Only Mahesa has seen you play among the four of us, and that’s unfair!”

“You’re treating us differently, now?” Jirendra stirred it up further with his words, jokingly clicking his tongue.

It made Abim go into his awkward mode. “That wasn’t—”

“We kinda expected that, so we—Me and Anin, of course, registered you already,” Mahesa said suddenly, hands busy scrolling down his phone. “Here’s the proof,”

“Traitor,” Abim grumbled. “When did you fall out of love with me like this,” he said dramatically with puppy eyes afterwards.

Next to the soap opera Abim and Mahesa showed, Anin smiled mysteriously. The next second, Anin and Mahesa stared at each other, then gave a

code to Jirendra, who immediately jumped from the window. Before Abim could react, three of them had already dragged him to the music room.

“Here,” Anin gave Abim a music score. “Feel free to modify it, by the way,”

Abim scanned the music score. “Moonlight Sonata?”

Anin just nodded. “Mahesa was the one who said that Moonlight Sonata is your best piece, so I thought it would be easier for you to use it,” he said. After Anin said that, Mahesa nodded vigorously, and Jirendra scratched his head in confusion.

“I don’t know whether that was good news or bad news,” Jirendra chirped, and Mahesa slapped his back.

“Of course, it’s good news! Moonlight Sonata is the piece that Abim know so well!” Mahesa protested.

“But, I don’t think I still got it. It’s been five years,” Abim unconfidently said, and when he was about to drag his legs back to the class, Anin held him, then sat him down on the stool.

“Don’t say it that way. You have a strong muscle memory,” Mahesa said disapprovingly. “Where’s the piano prodigy Abimana Raharja I know?”

Abim’s face hardened. “*Never. Call. Me. That. Again. That person died with Mom already five years ago,*”

Five years is a long time. And during those five years, Abim never touched the piano in that room—He didn't even open the whole room after his mom's death. And now, Abim stood in front of the door that would lead him to that room, holding a bunch of keys—He was pretty sure the key was one of them. Thoughts were swirling around his head. Should he do what Mahesa and Anin wanted him to do, or should he just be disqualified from the competition by not showing up on the day of the competition and never play the piano ever again?

Honestly, he's *scared*. *He was scared that he wouldn't fulfil everyone's expectations about him*. The piano prodigy Abimana Raharja, the Abimana Raharja, son of a talented pianist who had won every competition out there, the gifted Abimana Raharja, the Abimana Raharja, son of two most excellent musicians at that time, or *his mom's expectations*. He wasn't a *weird* musician, just like Anindya Kusuma was. Anin could tell her story to everyone who heard her violin play, but Abimana is just a robot programmed to play the music as it is. He had no clue how to tell everyone about his story and feelings.

His grip tightened around the keys—his breath was getting heavier, and cold sweats started to drip continuously around his head and neck. With a trembling hand, he brought his hand closer to the keyhole to open the music room. Not even a second later, the smell of dusty items stung his nose—he coughed a little bit, but then he forced himself to enter the room. A beautiful grand piano stood in front of him. Although a little bit dusty (and maybe rusty), it was one of his favourite things in the past. At the same time, Abim shivered, cold sweat started to drip harder, his heart beat faster than before, and his body started to tremble even more—And he

suddenly sat down in front of the piano stool. He felt like his legs were giving up, and he began to have illusions about a woman who kept pestering him about his piano mistakes. He then brought his hands closer to his ears, trying so desperately to cover his ears as he didn't want to hear those screams before he finally screamed in pain, with tears starting to fall out from his beautiful eyes.

The old man was entering the house when he heard a painful scream. The bag that was held before got thrown, and before he walked quickly to where the sound was coming from, he wanted to find his son as soon as possible. His eyes caught the space around him, realising that the keys were missing. His pace quickened, and he rushed to a room where he knew Abim wouldn't be. "No," he panicked before climbing up the ladder quickly. "ABIMANA!" after finally reaching the room, he opened the door and found Abim sitting helplessly beside the piano stool. "God, Abimana, are you okay?" he asked; panic in his voice could be heard, and the wailing sound from the helpless teenager he just found got louder.

The two of them hugged each other, the old man's hand slowly caressing Abim's back. They were pouring all the pent-up emotions they had for a while. After some time, "Thanks, Dad," Abim chirped. "Sorry if I made you startled earlier,"

And his dad just sighed. "It should be me apologising, sorry for leaving you alone for all these years," he said softly, his hands still affectionately caressing Abim's back.

Abim, on the other hand, buried his head more into his father's hug before raising his head and, "Can Abim still play the piano, tho?"

His dad released their hug, but his hands still stroked Abim's shoulder. "Is Abim still scared?" he asked softly, and Abim answered with a hesitant shake of his head, making his father looked at him in despair. "If Abim's still scared, why do Abim want to play the piano again?"

"SO HOW DID IT GO?" Anin asked cheerfully when they walked back home together, causing a buzz inside Abim's ear.

"Mahesa's my neighbour, and why are you following me?"

Anin flicked Abim's head, and then Anin made a cute gesture to show him that Mahesa and Jirendra had additional volley lessons. "You must've forgotten that those two are the school's beloved volleyball athletes," she continued while clicking her tongue. "Besides, you look so pitiful, walking alone to your home—" "I should be the one saying that? More than half the school know me. Just tell me what you want, really," Abim sighed in defeat. "I won't be mad,"

And Anin smiled. "Mahesa and his mom showed me your play several years ago, and I think you're an amazing pianist," he gave him thumbs up right in front of Abim. "Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Bach, Mozart, just say whatever piece, you will always play it so flawlessly, and I envy that trait,"

Hearing that, Abim groaned. "Instead, I should be the one envying you; you could *express* anything with your violin," he said. "There's no need to envy me; I could only play it like what was written on the piano scores,"

Anin pouted. “And losing every competition because I don’t meet the judges’ standards? Come on, I want to win too!” she grumbled. Her feet kicked the pebbles along the road, spacing out and checking the scenery around them.

Two of them buried themselves deep into their minds. The trail along the river they were passing through started to get greener after being hit by a fairly large storm just a few days ago. Small flower buds started to appear among the weeds, and some of the dandelions along the river also started to look alive to greet the good season this year.

“I tried to play it again yesterday,” after some silence, Abim opened his mouth again, and Anin looked at him in disbelief. “Yesterday, Dad’s home, and I tried to play it again, *Minuet in G Major*,” he started his story when he felt like Anin was a little interested. “But I stopped in the middle of the play,” and his grin widened.

Anin clicked her tongue, full of disappointment, feet starting to kick more pebbles on their trail. Abim, feeling more guilty than ever, just tried to catch her up (Anin was walking fast, he swore) with a little jog. One second later, Anin stopped to pick up a pebble as she wanted to throw it into the river. But before she could throw the pebble in her grip, she felt lightheaded, and her legs gave up. The next thing she remembers before she lost consciousness, Abim was increasing his pace while calling her name.

Anin remembered that she was still at the river bank with Abim, but why did he see the usual room she always got whenever she came to the hospital? The

IV drip installed into her body depicted the fact that she was admitted to the hospital (she didn't know for how long), but she knew that the disease she had recurred inevitably. She sighed continuously while scanning the whole (too familiar) room. The scenery seen through the window is a dark sky with twinkling city lamps in the distance. On the other hand, someone held her right hand, and she could hear the soft snore coming from him. Realising she wasn't alone, she turned his head to find her dad sleeping in his seat while holding her hand tightly. *Dad's probably tired*, she thought, and she scanned the other part of the room. There, on the sofa, she could find a handbag lying helplessly. It was her mom's, and she remembered it was the beloved handbag she got from her dad on their wedding anniversary two years ago. She could also faintly hear someone talking on the other side of the door. That was probably her mom talking with either the doctor or the nurses who cared for her. She didn't get bothered by all of that, but she sighed before his eyes caught the image of her phone lying on top of her uniforms—By the way, when did her mom (or any of the nurses) change her clothes? When did her parents arrive? How long has she been asleep? What's wrong with her at this moment?

A lot of questions wandered around her head, but Anin knew that *this time, too, she must recover*. Other than she wants to show more of her violin plays, she also wants to see other piano plays by the magnificent Abimana Raharja. Maybe, just maybe, there's one thing that Abim doesn't know, and maybe Anin wasn't being truthfully evident for those things. It's just that *she wanted to see him play again*.

“You’re awake,” the door slid open, revealing a beautiful woman in her 40s with a worried face in her eyes.

Anin smiled. “When did you guys arrive?” he asked. The woman sighed. Instead of answering Anin’s question, he shook Anin’s dad’s body to wake him up. The man who had just opened his eyes then shook his head to regain consciousness before looking at Anin and going to the bathroom to wash his face.

“Since a guy called himself Abimana Raharja and your friend Mahesa panicked because you suddenly fainted at the river bank,” her mom said softly. “Mahesa even left the additional volley lessons, and they just left. I was talking to them outside after they said that they were going to go home,”

Anin sighed in disappointment, sensing that her hand had gone numb because she had started to feel the sting from the IV drip. “What happened while I was asleep?”

Her mom sat down with an unexplainable gaze. “That Abimana Raharja, wasn’t he the one who inspired you to play the violin?”

“Isn’t that obvious?” Anin asked rhetorically.

And her mom sighed (yes, again). “Now, what? Didn’t you say that he stopped playing his piano again? Your violin play is *weird* if I have to compare it with his piano play,”

Anin thought about it for a while before opening her mouth again. “His last piano play in that competition. I thought he was very emotional at that time, and I can feel every emotion he wanted to convey to the audience,” she said. “Maybe, for you, it was a fucked up piano play, but for me, I just thought that he

wanted to say something with his play,” she continued, hands playing with the IV drip.

“Don’t do anything to the IV drip,” her mom scolded. “Be honest with me. You want to show the people and the judges that you can play the violin even with your emotions, right? They kept bugging you about your emotions every time you played and that your emotions were too careless for a 12-year-old girl,”

And Anin grinned. “Hehe,”

“It’s too easy to read you, Nin,” his father joined in their conversation when he saw the two were conversing. “But the doctor said that you have to go to either Singapore or Texas for your treatment; your cancer’s getting worse as days pass by,”

Anin may look like your average sick, weak girl, but truthfully, she’s stronger than you thought. She had just turned eight when she found out that she had thyroid cancer. She didn’t understand the reason for her visit to the hospital so often that she did it calmly, without any evil thoughts—But she was just a kid, she wanted to play with her friends too!

The cancer, fortunately, was discovered in its early stage, so she was able to be treated with radiation therapy; after it all finished, the doctor would pick the smaller cancer cells through an operation. Anin’s initial imagination about the operation was that she would have a big, big scar across her neck, so she was afraid of the operation. But as long as she could play again with her friends afterwards, Anin would do it all!

So, in just one month after that, Anin got operated—the doctors weren't trying to drag it any longer, and the operation was a successful one. Surprisingly, though, the big scar Anin imagined wasn't there. That time, she looked up to one of the doctors who operated on her with eyes full of questions. "Doc, my friends said the scar from the operation is veeeeery big, but why do I have no scar?" she asked cutely, and the doctor chuckled.

"Because Anin is a good, clever girl, and Anin's problem wasn't that big, so this Granpa could take it and leave no scar!" the doctor answered cheerfully and brought Anin's hand to touch somewhere along her neck. "How is it? It's there, isn't it?"

Anin, feeling the small scar from the operation, looked back at the doctor in awe. Her eyes sparkled like the kids who just got something they wanted.

"Anin shouldn't be embarrassed because Anin doesn't have any scar!" the doctor concluded with a big smile, then turned to her parents, who were smiling, but this time, he looked at them with an unexplainable gaze. "This may bring a lot of uncomfortable decisions in the future—But there's some possibility that the cancer will come back. I don't know exactly when that will happen; worst odds, it may be more dangerous than before," he said. "Anin may be lucky this time because we found it at an earlier stage so that we could prevent everything, but this won't happen for the second time because if the cancer reoccurs again, it could be weaker, or worse, stronger,"

They moved when Anin was 12 because his grandparents asked for their help, and they have lived there since then. From there, Anin developed an interest in music and started attending many music competitions. At first, he knew nothing about music because he was bored, and his parents took him to a piano competition—which Abim attended as one of the competitors.

Anin, feeling more bored than usual, tried to enjoy the piano plays. It didn't end well because she kept complaining throughout the show (she felt like the participants weren't showing their emotions) because the judges kept giving them high scores. That was before one person finally appeared, playing one of Chopin's pieces *flawlessly*. Anin was in a daze when that person played the piece, creating a beautiful melody that captivated the audience—she could not say anything evil about that, making his parents stare at her confusedly when Anin dropped her jaw. Anin, on the other hand, with her jaw dropped significantly, didn't believe what she was hearing until the end of the play.

While waiting for the announcement of the finalists outside the auditorium, Anin immediately said, "I want to try music!" and made her parents throw a confused look at each other. Just one piano play and it triggered Anin's interest. It was also Anin's first time to say what she wanted with a look full of determination inside her eyes. And they knew this time, Anin wouldn't take any no.

"Are you being serious about that?"

Anin just nodded nonchalantly. "That was cool!" she commented before her eyes caught a glimpse of a boy, still wearing his stage suit, dragged by a woman

in her wheelchair. While her parents discussed something, she sneaked out of their sight to follow those people—away from everyone’s sight.

Anin was trying to keep a safe distance so that she wouldn’t be caught following them—and she heard a loud slap coming from them after they reached the spacious garden inside the building. Surprised, she hurried to hide at the back of a pillar, trying so hard not to make her body visible to those two. She knew that the woman slapped the boy, and she wanted to take him out of there, but she kept his intention as she heard, “I never taught you to play the piano with your emotions.”

Anin was intrigued by how the boy would answer that, but at the same time, she also wanted to save that kid from another slap that he could receive.

“Your piano play earlier was messed up. I don’t think you can go to the finals. I told you often that you shouldn’t incorporate your emotions into your piano play. You must win this competition, but you ruined it with your emotions,” the woman spoke in a flat yet intimidating tone.

“Sorry,” the boy answered in a soft voice.

“After this, you shouldn’t be resting. You should be the best, both in your school and you should be the best pianist like I do,”

At the back of the pillar, Anin was speechless with what the woman had said. She genuinely thought that emotions play a significant role in any music—so the audience can hear the beautiful melodies created by the harmony of someone’s professionalism and emotions. Feelings won’t ruin the music—she was wrong about that. She was surprised when she heard that the woman in her wheelchair was a

pianist, but she just shrugged off all the evil thoughts that started to build up inside her head.

“I can’t play the piano anymore, but you should continue the legacy of the Raharja as musicians,”

“Mmm, are the Raharjas famous as musicians?” Anin asked cutely when they were coming back home from the competition (after they confirmed who would be in the finals).

“And where did you hear about that?” her mom asked, hands reaching out to caress Anin’s face (who was moving herself to get closer to the driver’s seat).

Anin was blushing, her mind shifting, only to give her a reasonable answer other than ‘*I saw Abimana Raharja slapped by his mom*’ before finally opening up his mouth, “I saw the name of Abimana Raharja sat at the top of the first place between the finalists, and I just heard some people muttered that he deserves that place because he was his parents’ offspring, which apparently, is a famous musician.”

“Anin wanted to be like him?” he asked, and after not hearing from her dad for a while, Anin nodded. “But Anin should try hard to be a musician like he does. Is that okay with you?”

“Mom, Dad, there’s no need to be worried! I can do it!”

Rather than choosing the piano as the instrument she wanted to learn, her eyes twinkled more when she saw the violin displayed in a music store. At that time,

she felt like the violin was calling her, so they enrolled Anin in a violin class. Since that day, Anin started to get serious about practising her violin plays—She also attended recitals and competitions regularly. Other than piano competitions and recitals (lowkey because she wanted to see Abimana Raharja play), she also started participating in amateur violin competitions and recitals. But it all lasted for roughly eight months before she finally mustered up her courage and attended the competition as a contestant in a regional competition.

From that time, people started to call her the ‘Weird Violinist’ because she always tried to play the violin with a completely new composition that sounded so much like she wanted to take down her piano accompanist. Abim was a piano accompanist for one of the contestants, and he was surprised when he heard Anin’s violin play. When Anin found out about the others’ surprised gaze during her play, Anin just mysteriously smiled slightly. Those moments repeated a few times before they finally met at the final of a national music competition. Abim got a perfect score in the piano category, and Anin was just a rookie who got lucky to be qualified as a finalist because he won the votes from the audience.

On the day of the final, instead of being happy because he was qualified as one of the finalists, Abim looked gloomy from the beginning. When Anin saw Abim sitting at the corner of the waiting room alone, he knew that Abim was in a terrible state of mental. She chose not to disturb him because she needed to concentrate on her piece (and because the contest for the violin category happened earlier than the piano category).

Again, Anin thought that her violin play was flawless, and today, she got to win over the piano accompanist (her accompanist smiled proudly when they finished the piece together, and they left the stage with broad smiles engraved onto their face). She chose to stay at the venue, waiting for the piano competition. As the accompanist finally left her, she scanned the whole auditorium to find any woman in her wheelchair (yes, the one that she spied on that competition, the one who slapped Abim and scolded him harshly). But there's no sign of her—except for Abim, who sat at the contestants' seat. She tilted his head cutely, trying to grasp the situation, but every time she got a bizarre idea about what could happen, she shrugged it off. Then, she buried herself in the seat she was sitting on, with a pout visible to whoever saw her. At first, she just wanted to show off her musical plays, as she always tried to incorporate her emotions in every play, and that happened because she wanted to break her stereotypes last time.

And finally, the competition started. Until the tenth contestant, Anin didn't find anything that interested her during their piano plays, and honestly, she yawned from time to time. When it was time for the 11th contestant, Anin jumped up happily in her seat as she saw Abimana Raharja finally come up on the stage—he shined, but he had a gloomy face plastered onto his face. Anin didn't break her sight from him until Abim seated himself on the piano stool, and finally, a tune was heard from the piano.

“La Campanella,” Anin mumbled quietly when she finally identified the tune Abim played. She could hear the audience and the other contestants gasping because of his choice of piece, but Abim kept playing it calmly. Not only that, Anin

also recorded a lot of surprised faces around her when they heard the tunes of *La Campanella* come from the stage.

Abim started to play his composition when they reached the middle of the song, making the audience captivated by his play. In the audience's seat, Anin realised something was wrong with Abim's play that day. She didn't want to assume anything, but he could hear a heartbroken melody coming from Abim's play—making it sound so rough, and Anin was visibly concerned. In the climax, Abim pressed the wrong piano key, resulting in Anin's surprised look (of which she controlled her face just a second later). Hearing such things, the judges immediately crossed something on their score paper, and Abim *ran away*.

Maheśa knew those tunes. It was a sound from an old piano—Knowing that, Maheśa smiled as he stared at the house across and removed the headphones he wore during his study time. He sat comfortably on his seat to hear the beautiful tunes from Abim's home after a long time. He heard one piano piece played emotionally—Maheśa didn't know much about music but from a piece of his memory, it was one of the pieces that Abim usually did in his free time. Little did he know, it was a piece to show everyone that he was in bad shape.

Maheśa obviously didn't dare to ask him, and he just continued to study (he has a test tomorrow) as he was accompanied by Abim's discordant music play (mind you, that piano wasn't tuned for 5 whole years). He didn't dare to say anything, because he knew he wasn't that knowledgeable in music, unlike Anin and Abim did. Remembering something, he grabbed his phone and dialled a number.

Ever since he was a kid, up until his mom's death, Abim's life was fully orchestrated by that woman. His mom monitored All of his moves closely, resulting in Abim's inability to play with his friends during his free time. He didn't know what happened in the accident that affected his mom's life; all he knew was his mom wasn't able to play the piano again after that accident. His father rarely showed up because he was a respected member of a famous overseas orchestra. Because of that, Abim only met him thrice a year, or if they wanted to, his mom and Abim would fly out to meet him.

Abim didn't have any good memories that could make him smile. His brain was occupied mainly by moments that could make him tremble in fear or when his mom lashed out her anger at him in every competition (every time he made mistakes during his play in those competitions). His father had no clue about this because he was working overseas. Even to date, his father sometimes left him to be in Mahesa's parents' care (but not that much since he joined a local orchestra so that he could care for Abim more).

He won a lot of awards during his active year as a pianist, and his mom often boasted about it because she was the one who taught Abim herself. However, Abim never smiled at every victory he obtained. Even more, when asked, he would always say it was his mom's victory, not his. People may think it was an innocent answer from a kid because she taught him herself—and one more reason was that his mom was well-known as the pianist who was forced to retire after an accident happened. Truth being said, Abim was *designed* to answer those questions with a

specific answer from his mother. He never knew that what his mom did was wrong. All he knew was his mom wanted him to be a pianist, too. His mom always boasts about him, but she doesn't care what Abim wants. Hell, she never cares about Abim's inferiority complex about his ability.

Abim is a good pianist, and everyone knows that, but he once ran—He once ran away from his messy play when his mom had just died, but at the same time, he needed to compete in the final round of a national music competition. It was impossible to withdraw suddenly, even when he was still mourning. What would the other say if he suddenly withdrew from the competition at the final?

“Abimana, you don't want to see me sad because you didn't win the competition, right? Just play the *La Campanella* perfectly and win the competition, so that I won't be sad anymore,” was the last thing he remembered before she went unconscious for a few days before her death.

Just two days before the finals, his mom finally took her last breath. Abim wasn't allowed to cry, so he desperately tried to hold back his tears—His father then hugged him, and all hail broke loose.

No one dared to take *La Campanella* as the piece they wanted to perform, even in the final round—Abim, on the other side, must play that piece since his mom chose it for the finals. He had to practice primarily by himself because his mom was lying helplessly in the hospital. He had to make sure that his hand could move one octave in a short time as he knew that when he was playing this piece, the pianist should remain relaxed, but he must keep his agility so he doesn't ruin

the song. Abim had a knack for those things, so his mom thought *La Campanella* was perfect for the finale.

Abim mastered almost all the piano pieces (just like Anin said, say whatever piece, he will be able to play it flawlessly). Contrary to popular belief, Abim had one flaw that most didn't know about; he would unconsciously press the wrong piano key in the middle of his play. That's why, to overcome it, his mom used to slap the finger that made the mistake with an iron ruler—and it caused Abim to practice endlessly so that he wouldn't be slapped. Abim did that far before his dad became a member of that famous orchestra—Three of them were still staying in the same place, and every time Abim made a mistake, his dad would save him from his mother's ruler slap. By the time his dad left them so often, Abim never dared to do that again—and it made his mom happier than before and trained him harder.

Unlike his mom, his father never got mad if he made a mistake. If Abim's dad caught her in the act, he would immediately snatch Abim from the piano stool, and then they would play the piano together, hands being guided by him continuously.

That's why when his father asked why he wanted to play the piano again, Abim just reacted with "Someone wants to hear it,"

The old man smiled. "There's no need for you to be so pressured about that if you're still trembling, you can withdraw from the competition—"

"But Abim wanted to make her smile again," Abim answered, cutting off his father's sentence. "I don't know how much time she has left,"

His father sighed deeply. He brought his wrinkly hands to Abim's shoulder and said, "Abimana, you don't need to please other people that way. If Abim wants to play the piano and smile again, I can help you, but if you play the piano to make the other happy, I don't think I should help you," he said. "So now, let me ask you again, are you *happy* when you play the piano?"

April 20xx

After talking with Anin for two months, Abim finally succeeded in playing the *Moonlight Sonata* piece. He did it after his lessons with his dad to get some emotional support, as he would always tremble during his practice. He would always go to the hospital after he finished the lessons after school (or during the weekend, he just practised another piece). Anin was delighted with Abim's growth over two months but kept her mouth shut about Abim's mother. She knew she would cross the line if she asked him about his mother, and Abim seemed like he didn't even want to talk about her anymore.

In Abim's eye, Anin is the perfect emotional support—She never crosses the line, and Abim would be delighted to tell her anything. But at that moment, Abim didn't want *that memory* to ruin his upcoming performance. Abim, for once, wanted to come back to the music scene, and it was because Anin brought him happiness when he played the piano. Before his visit to Anin's, Abim would willingly record his play. Later, he would analyse the video with Anin to practice (the hospital didn't have a piano).

Anin couldn't see Abim's play in the International Music Competition two months later. Abim ensured he did his best during the practice but was sad when he learned that Anin wouldn't attend the competition, even as an audience. Mahesa told him earlier that only Jirendra and him would attend the competition. Anin would miss the competition because she had something to do in the hospital, so she had no choice except to miss Abim's performance.

Abim wanted to show Anin that he had finally overcome his fear of playing the piano again with the help of his dad. He realised that he loved the piano, but the trauma caused by his mom made him avoid the piano for five whole years. For now, he focused on how he would play the piece in the competition—and how to bring his piece to life.

Moonlight Sonata is a beautiful piano piece—It is a sad love story between a man who loved a woman dearly and couldn't be together as the man has no rank in society. The man's hearing started to deteriorate afterwards, leaving him to compose the piece with limited hearing. From the piece, Abim chose the first part of the piece. He made his choice after Anin told him that she wanted Abim to play the first part. At first, Abim didn't understand why she asked him to play that part because that particular part would give the listeners an impression of death. He shrugged all of his thoughts away and focused on how to make it enjoyable for the listeners.

The grand concert hall was a cathedral of silence, the air thick with anticipation as the audience settled into their seats. The stage was illuminated by a soft, focused light, casting a gentle glow on the gleaming black grand piano that

awaited its next performer. The polished surface of the piano reflected the spotlight, creating an aura of both grandeur and intimacy.

He stepped onto the stage, his heart pounding with a mix of excitement and anxiety. The soft murmur of the audience faded into the background as he approached the piano, the weight of the moment pressing down on him. This was a prestigious competition, a chance to prove himself among the best, and he had chosen Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata as his piece—a decision that both challenged and comforted him.

Taking a deep breath, he sat down on the bench, adjusting his posture and placing his hands gently on the keys. He closed his eyes for a moment, trying to center himself, to find the emotional core of the music. The hall seemed to hold its breath as he began to play.

The first notes of the Moonlight Sonata filled the room, their haunting beauty resonating through the silence. Each note was deliberate, infused with a profound sadness that seemed to emanate from his very soul. His fingers moved with a delicate precision, coaxing the melancholy melody from the keys with a tenderness that belied the intensity of his feelings.

The audience was entranced, drawn into the poignant world he created with each passing chord. His performance was deeply emotive, every phrase imbued with a sorrow that was palpable, almost tangible. Yet, behind his focused expression, a flicker of confusion danced in his eyes. The sadness he conveyed was so real, so consuming, but its origin was a mystery even to him.

As Abim played, he felt an inexplicable heaviness in his heart, a weight that pressed down with each note. The music seemed to reach into the depths of his being, stirring emotions he couldn't name. He played with an intensity that bordered on desperation, as if searching for the source of the sorrow that flowed through his fingertips.

His mind raced, trying to grasp why the Moonlight Sonata affected him so profoundly. Was it the memory of a forgotten pain, or an echo of someone else's grief? He couldn't tell. The questions swirled in his head, feeding the melancholy that colored his performance. He poured his confusion and yearning into the music, the sadness deepening with each passage.

As the sonata reached its most mournful moments, he felt tears prick at the corners of his eyes. The emotion was raw, unfiltered, and his hands trembled slightly on the keys. The audience, oblivious to his inner turmoil, was captivated by the depth of feeling he brought to the piece.

He played on, getting caught in the music's embrace, the notes a conduit for emotions he couldn't fully understand. The final notes of the sonata lingered in the air, a whisper of sorrow that slowly faded into silence. The hall remained hushed, the audience holding onto the last echoes of the performance.

He sat still for a moment, his hands resting on the keys, his breathing heavy. The sadness still clung to him, the questions still unanswered. He rose from the bench, acknowledging the applause with a nod, his mind still clouded by the emotions the music had stirred.

As he left the stage, the sadness lingered, a silent companion that he couldn't shake. He had played with all his heart, yet the mystery of his own feelings remained. The Moonlight Sonata had revealed a part of him he didn't fully understand, leaving him both fulfilled and bewildered, a performer touched by the profound beauty of the music and the elusive nature of his own sorrow.

Little did he know, Anin was pronounced dead on the day of the competition. Only Mahesa knew about it, and he tried to suppress his tears as he entered the auditorium to see Abim's performance after a long time. Anin's time in this world ended abruptly, and no one could say goodbye to her. Mahesa visited him last night, and he stayed with Anin and his parents until this morning when Anin asked him to see Abim's performance. He got an uneasy feeling this morning, but Anin kept bugging him to go to the competition—So he gave up and left the hospital. Just as he finished showering earlier, he got a call from Anin's parents, who told him that Anin was pronounced dead as she wasn't able to fight the cancer anymore.

Jirendra saw Mahesa continuously checking his phone, and he just told him to set it aside as Abim finally came up on stage. Abim started the piece with a long sigh, and those graceful fingers were finally playing the piano in front of the audience again. Abim missed those feelings—the feelings of people who were amazed by his plays, the sense of pride that his family once had, and the calm feelings of the piano's tune, which made him shed a little bit during his play.

Mahesa cried in his seat, with Jirendra panicking and trying to calm him down. After Abim finished playing his piece, Mahesa finally sniffled and stood up to applaud him. Anin told him that Abimana probably would play something for his death—And it was true. Mahesa knew the meaning of the piece, so he couldn't suppress his tears when he heard the tune from the piano. Mahesa felt all those emotions the piece tried to portray: deep sadness and desperation of losing, and that he would most likely not be able to hear Anin's weird violin play again.

Mahesa finally understood why Anin kept bugging him to attend Abim's recital. It was a song that Anin asked Abim to play, with Abim, who was clueless that Anin was not with them anymore, but he could portray all those emotions in his recital today. Anin wanted to hear Abim play the piece, but God forbade her from doing so and took her away from her friends instead.

"Why were you crying earlier?" Jirendra asked.

Mahesa didn't say anything; he just showed the text he got from Anin's parents. It was the time of her funeral, along with the address of the funeral home they used to mourn for her. Jirendra stared at him with an unexplainable gaze before he dashed to the waiting seat, forcing Abim to get up and follow him.

Three of them then gathered together outside the auditorium, and Mahesa finally took a deep breath before saying, "Anin's dead. The funeral will be conducted in three days, I got the address of the funeral home they used for her,"

At first, Abim stood frozen, his phone slipping from his grasp and clattering onto the floor. The sound seemed distant, like it was coming from another

room, another world. His vision blurred as tears welled up, unbidden and unstoppable. He stumbled backward, his legs giving way as he collapsed into a chair. The weight of the news pressed down on him, making it hard to breathe.

Memories flooded his mind in a chaotic rush. The stolen glances, the shared laughter, the quiet moments that spoke louder than words ever could. He had only just begun to understand his feelings, to recognize the depth of his affection. And now, it was too late. The realisation brought a fresh wave of pain, each memory a knife twisting in his heart.

His sobs started quietly, small, gasping sounds that grew into guttural cries of anguish. He clutched at his chest, as if trying to hold his breaking heart together. The room seemed to close in on him, the walls echoing his grief back at him. His tears fell freely, wetting his cheeks and dripping onto his shirt, but he was beyond caring.

Abim's mind was a whirlpool of regret and despair. He thought of all the things he had wanted to say, the moments he had let slip by. The chances he would never get to take. The future that had seemed so full of promise now lay in ruins at his feet. The finality of death was a cruel reality he was unprepared to face.

Eventually, the storm of his grief began to ebb, leaving him drained and hollow. His sobs quieted to soft whimpers, his body shivering with the aftermath of his breakdown. He sat there, staring blankly ahead, the enormity of his loss settling over him like a dark shroud.

Abim knew his life would never be the same. The person he just realised he loved was gone, leaving a void that nothing could ever fill. As he sat in the

silence, he made a silent vow to carry their memory with him, to cherish the moments they had shared. It was a small comfort, but it was all he had left. And in his heart, he hoped that somehow, somewhere, they knew how much they had meant to him.



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