

ON THE FIELDS
by Rachel Hoover

NAME: Rachel Hoover

WHERE I AM FROM: Carmichael, California

BIO: Rachel Hoover started up playwriting again after taking an online class with Jenny Lyn Bader through Luna Stage. She recently had her play “Shooting Stars” published on the website for The Third Quarantine Playwriting Bakeoff. She is thrilled to be writing with a purpose, and in particular participating in this Bake-Off!

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What’s keeping you positive? The opportunity to create, cuddling with my kids, and keeping in touch with friends and family.

Yes, you can publish this!

CHARACTERS

JOHN. 28, Proficient trumpet player; practical.

WIN: 23; Aspiring trumpet player; music enthusiast; dreamer

DAMON: 40s; lawyer; charismatic; in suit

TIME

Summer, 2020. Late morning.

PLACE

The porch of the home of the great uncle of brothers John and Win.

There is a rocking chair and a storage chest on the porch.

An unseen set of stairs, downstage center, lead up to the porch.

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*John and Win are standing on the porch of their great uncle's home.
John walks downstage center, looks out for someone arriving.
Win holds a trumpet. He attempts a few notes. Plays awfully.*

John: Could you please put that damn thing down?

Win: Holding it makes me feel closer to Uncle Ernie.

John: Your playing it will make him roll over in his grave.

Win: Oh, he knew I couldn't play. But we have time now, when we are apart from everyone. There is time to learn.

John: Well, you aren't apart from me, and I don't want to hear it.

Win: (*Understanding.*) I know. I know we don't have soundproof walls --

John: I wish...

Win: Well, maybe we could put egg cartons on the walls in his office --

John: Why would we ruin a perfectly good office?

Win: ...But I really like playing out here on the porch, like Uncle Ernie used to do. I like to think of the notes going out into the air, and rippling across the water.

John: It's lucky that there aren't any neighbors nearby.

Win: But if there had been a closer neighbor, someone might have seen him when he

fell and gotten him to the hospital in time. Maybe he would be the one playing the trumpet here now.

John: If he hadn't already given it away to you.

Win: I still would have let him play it! I loved to hear him play!

John: I still don't understand why he gave the damn thing to you.

Win: Just because he knew I loved it, I guess. But I would never want to take it from him. I guess he felt he didn't have the strength to play it any more, and he wanted to make sure it was in good hands.

(John turns away)

Win: I'm sorry -- would you like to try to play? *(Starting to clean it off)* I know you're much more proficient than I am --

John: *(Violently)* No! I don't want to touch that thing!

Win: *(Backing off)* OK, ok! I just thought --

John: Well, you thought wrong.

Win: OK. I'm no Mark Inouye, and I probably never will be, but just the feel of the instrument in my hands, the vibrations as I blow. It makes me feel connected.

John: Mark Inouye?

Win: Did you know that back in high school, once in a concert Mark Inouye held a note so long that he passed out?

John: Yeah, Dad told that story a hundred times. I always thought it showed bad judgment.

Win: It showed passion and commitment! I love the way he almost dances when he plays, and makes the audience start moving too. *(Pulls out phone. Plays video of Mark Inouye's "Washington Avenue Sidewalk Grooves")* This is one of my favorites. Check him out when he plays "Washington Avenue Sidewalk Grooves." *(Hands phone to John, starts dancing as "air playing" trumpet. John glances down at phone, then back up at Win. He stands, unmoved, but lets two-minute video play out.)*

John: Do you really think that is appropriate at this time?

Win: Oh -- I didn't mean to be disrespectful --

John: What if the lawyer drives up and sees you dancing. It might seem like you are dancing on his grave.

Win: That's the last thing I want.

John: *(Reaching for trumpet)* Let's put that thing away.

Win: It makes me feel close to him.

John: *(Losing temper)* Just give it to me! *(Grabs trumpet)* I don't want to see it, let alone hear it. *(Looks around, sees storage chest -- opens it, shoves trumpet inside.)*

Win: When is the lawyer coming?

John: Any minute now.

Win: Is it his old friend Charles?

John: Charles is getting old. He might still be practicing, but he brought someone else on -- I think on the phone he said his name was Damon.

Win: Did he know Uncle Ernie?

John: I hope so. I'm guessing that taxes on the house will be a mess. I don't know if he had a second or third mortgage on this thing either.

Win: I'm sure you could have helped him get his finances in order.

John: Well, that is why he called me.

Win: I'm so sorry you didn't get the chance to see him before he died. And you just missed him! What rotten luck that you got a flat tire just then. I can barely forgive myself that I had run out to the store, but he wanted to have sweet ice

tea in when you came, because he knew it was your favorite.

John: Some things you can't help.

Win: I'm so sorry you couldn't get here days earlier and hear him tell some of his stories.

John: Stories don't pay the bills.

Win: But, as he always said, they give meaning. Like music.

John: Being distracted by leisure activities when you don't have control of the big things is just laziness.

Win: But there are a lot of things in life we don't have control over.

John: Too many things.

Win: It's how we live, and how we are remembered that matters.

John: That's -- *(Sees a person from a distance)* That's the lawyer.

Damon, a man in his 40s in a suit carrying a briefcase walks up to porch.

Damon: Hello. You must be *(eyes them)* John, and Wynton. Win.

Win: Yes -- did Charles describe -- I didn't know he even remembered --

Damon: Oh, I know a lot about you. Where's that famous trumpet your uncle gave you?

Win gives a big smile -- and starts toward storage chest. John steps in front of him.

John: That isn't necessary. *(Stiff smile)* Next thing you know, he'll want to play it, and that *certainly* isn't necessary. Let's get down to business.

Damon: As you wish. *(Assesses space; sits on rocking chair.)* Win, do you have sheet music to play with that trumpet?

John: I don't see what that has to do with -

Win: Not really. I'm not really that good at playing it right now --

Damon: But you want to be?

Win: Of course!

Damon: If you go to your uncle's office, in the bottom shelf of the black filing cabinet, I believe you will find a box of manilla folders. I suggest you look inside it.

Win: I will! (*Goes inside house*)

John: How could you possibly know --

Damon: There are a lot of things I know. For instance -- you would like to get this over as quick as possible, and have me on my way. Correct?

John: Of course. One doesn't want to linger over these matters...

Damon: (*Smiles.*) Well. Let's get down to business. (*Opens his briefcase.*) You do know that you are the executor of the estate?

John: Which means that I get the thankless work of sorting through his bills and taxes.

Damon: There can be a lot of work. An executor can take many hours, over months, even years on the task.

John: Jesus! What a waste. It shouldn't take that long, especially when all he had was an old house, mortgaged to the hilt.

Damon: Oh, the house is completely paid off, plus there is an account for the taxes.

John: Really? Well, that is a relief.

Damon: Plus he has a bank account with at least a million dollars in it.

John: A million --

Damon: And you are the beneficiary.

Win: (*Running to door*) John -- you won't believe the sheet music that he has in the office. And it looks like it is just a box of extra file folders! First editions, signed by the composers. It's incredible. (*to Damon*) I don't mean to be rude -- I just really want to go through it.

Damon: By all means.

Win goes back inside house.

John: A million dollars?

Damon: And you are the beneficiary. But there is a catch.

John: Of course.

Damon: But it is what you wanted.

John: What I -- what do you mean?

Damon: You didn't like your uncle giving Win that trumpet, did you?

John: Well, of course not. He can't even play. It's torture to hear.

Damon: But he treasures it.

John: Well--

Damon: Like your uncle treasured it. And you wanted him to treasure you.

John: This is awfully personal -- I can't believe Charlie would--

Damon: This isn't about Charlie. This is about what happened between you and your uncle the last time that you saw him.

John: I'm sorry that I didn't visit often enough -- that too much time had gone by -- He always said I should come by once a month, whether I needed to or not

Damon: Oh, not that much time had gone by. What has it been, three days?

John: No -- I was supposed to come three days ago, but I didn't get here in time. I got a flat tire. Uncle Ernie was probably waiting for me when he tripped and fell down the stairs.

Damon: And playing the trumpet?

John: What?

Damon: The trumpet was in his hands when your brother found him, was it not?

John: Was that in the police report?

Damon: I didn't read the police report. So your uncle was found at the bottom of the stairs, with a head injury, and the trumpet also got banged...

John: Did Win tell you? No, he couldn't have told you -- did he tell Charlie?

Damon: Funny how the trumpet stayed in his hands all the way down.

John: Funny...

Damon: Unless it was placed there afterwards. Tell me, was he playing the trumpet?

John: I don't -- I don't know --

(Damon reaches into storage chest, takes trumpet)

Damon: Tell me -- where was the trumpet when you took it?

John: When I --

Damon: Was it on the chest? Or in his hands, as he played it?

John: It --

Damon: Was he looking down the road for Win to come back with your sweet tea, so he

could tell you both of you together his big plans?

John: How would you know -- about the sweet tea? Is there a bug in here...*(starts looking for listening devices)*

Damon: You called me.

John: I called? You called me --

Damon: Or perhaps invoked is the better word. Summoned.

John: How could I --

Damon: You remember that day. You'll never forget. You were standing -- about where you are right now. *(Moves to that space)* And Uncle Ernie was standing at the top of the steps, holding his trumpet. Now Win's trumpet. *(Hands John the trumpet. John walks, in a daze, to the top of the stairs.)*

John: "It should have new life," he said.

Damon: But you resented that.

John: *(turns to Damon)* How could he think Win could give it new life? Win is totally incompetent! He doesn't finish anything. He gets caught up in whatever interests him, but never masters anything. He is just a fan!

Damon: But your uncle valued his enthusiasm.

John: *(Turning back. As Uncle Ernie.)* "He still sees the magic! He gives oxygen to the flame."

Damon: But you wanted him to feel that way about you. *(Takes trumpet from him. Takes John's place at top of stairs, as John switches places with him.)*

John: I should make the flame burn. I want you to need *me* for the flame to burn. *(Takes trumpet from Damon)* YOU NEED ME! *(Begins to swing trumpet towards Damon's head.)*

Win: *(from other room)* John! *(Enters, looking down at CD in his hands.)*

(Damon freezes the action -- with motion, directs John to lower his hands.)

Damon: You wanted him to need you. To need you to make the flame burn. When you called that out as you brought the trumpet down, you called me. Invoked me. Summoned me. You were ready to sell your soul.

John: Who are you?

Damon: I have been called by different names over time. But I give people what they want when they don't care about the cost.

John: The cost...*(looks at the trumpet in his hands -- quickly puts it away from him.)*

Damon: So you hit him, and he fell down the stairs. You put the trumpet in his hands. And drove away and conveniently got a flat tire so your brother was the first one on the scene.

John: What else could I do?

Damon: The funny thing -- the ironic thing -- is that you already had what you wanted. Your uncle did need you, and needed you to keep the fire burning. That catch I mentioned to you? About the million dollars? It is yours, to spend as you wish. As long as you help turn this house into a museum of jazz music. Or at least a place of interest people are welcome to visit, with your uncle's collection displayed. That's why he summoned you -- and your brother. To share his idea. To bring you into it. Not just for paperwork.

John: People can't even go to museums these days --

Damon: *(Shrugs)* Then it can be a virtual tour until people are ready to visit again. I'm sure you have a willing curator here in Win. You just need to make sure the flame stays alive. *(Beat.)* And come by once a month.

John: *(Beat.)* And Win?

Damon: There are no requirements for him. But I don't think he'll need any. He could have a place to stay here and a job. All he needs is the enthusiasm. *(Looks at*

John) Unless *you'd* rather take over the day-to-day operations...

John: And what if I decide I don't want any of it?

Damon: I didn't read the police report, but other people could. And could question how the trumpet stayed in his hands during such a nasty fall. And could compare the injury on your uncle's head to the slight dent on the trumpet.

John: So you are threatening me with blackmail?

Damon: I'm just saying someone might bear light on the subject. *(Beat.)* There's also the question of Win. How do you want him to see you?

John: *(Looks at Win -- looks away.)* Is it too late? Will he already know?

Damon: Oh, it's too late. But he doesn't know yet. In fact let's see what happens, shall we?

Damon picks up trumpet, gives it to John. They return to their positions, John frozen a moment with trumpet about to hit Damon. John shifts it as though he is playing as Win looks up, then quickly puts the trumpet down. Win has seen him appearing to pretend to play, and smiles.

Win: It is fun, isn't it? Reminds me of when we used to go to the instrument petting zoo when we were little. Wouldn't it be great to see something like that again?

Damon: *(looks at John)* As a matter of fact --

Win: Thanks -- excuse me -- just a second -- *(with great enthusiasm)* John, look what I found! A CD of "Blood in the Fields" -- Wynton Marsalis won a Pulitzer for it, remember? The year I was born -- the first time for a jazz music composition!

John: Mom and Dad were so impressed, they named you after him.

Damon: *(smiles)* I think my business is done here.

Win: Thank you for coming! Sorry to be caught up in other things!

Damen nods, begins to walk off -- then stands by the side and watches.

Win: I can't wait to listen to it -- but it is over two hours long. Before I do -- *(Pulls out phone -- puts on video of Mark Inouye playing "Washington Avenue Sidewalk Grooves")* One more time! *(Takes the trumpet from John -- begins to dance as he airplays the song.)*

Damon smiles, walks off. John watches Win, unable to look away.