

Follow your heart and make your dreams come true.

La Leyenda

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/1823.html?s=pdf>

Chapter 1

The metal chain jingled as it hit the black pants with every stride. The boy strolled down the hall with the rest of his friends, smiling as if he was really happy. It wasn't the stares he minded, but rather the baggy pants he kept tripping over. Even though he didn't particularly like these pants, he wore them anyway, because that was the only way he would be accepted; and this was the only group that would accept him, or so he thought.

The other students were not staring simply because of the group's appearance, but rather because James was a member of it. He did not used to be like this. In fact, in elementary school, black was not his style at all. However, sixth grade marked a new stage for James. That was when the trouble began.

Life for James had never been that glamorous, but that year in sixth grade was when it turned even worse. Jeff, his stepfather, had decided that he could no longer deal with James's alcoholic mother. It wasn't that Angela had always been an alcoholic. There had been a few years of happiness until James's father lost his job and turned to alcohol for help. He became abusive and she became a drunk right along with him. The quickest escape from it all was the bottle. A year later, James's father abandoned her with two sons when James was only five.

Whenever James thought back to those days, he could never recall anything good about his father. He had experienced the blow of his father's hand and belt a few times and had seen his older brother, Alex, experience it a few times more. His father had a horrible temper and a gun, which frightened James even more. He even threatened to use it when things weren't going his way, and no one ever doubted him.

However, Jeff was different. James was seven when his mother first met him. He helped Angela to find a job and helped Alex

Virginia Abernathy

through high school. For a while it seemed as if things were going fine. Then he discovered why his wife was often late coming home. For even though she was no longer tormented by her previous husband, the bottle still had its control.

At first she had been able to hide her addiction. Jeff had no idea that she went through a bottle of whiskey and scotch every day. Late at night, she would dispose of the evidence by hiding it in the trash can under the rest of the garbage. Slowly, Jeff came to realize what she had been doing. That's when the conflicts began. They started out as small fights at first, and then grew into screaming matches. James didn't understand why they were so suddenly inclined to quarrel, and he wished they would stop.

After a year of conflict, Jeff finally divorced Angela and attempted to adopt her sons. At the time, James was nine and Alex was sixteen.

Jeff worked hard for a full year trying to prove to the judge that the woman was simply unable to take care of her children properly. However, by staying off the whiskey just long enough to win the case, Angela was able to convince the judge otherwise. It wasn't the fact that she might lose her children which motivated her; it was purely the satisfaction of winning.

Jeff was preparing to file another suit when he was struck and killed by a car. Alex and James were the first at the funeral; their mother never showed. Thus ended James's hope for a real father and a brighter future.

The students stared, looking up from their lockers, as James walked by with a smile as wide as ever on his face. For they did not know his past and they did not understand his motives.

Sixth grade was when he met his group of friends; the same year Jeff had died. They seemed nice, able to understand and relate to his troubles. They also taught him all their tricks. By the age of twelve, he knew how to obtain cigarettes, where to find cocaine, and who to go to for marijuana. However, he only knew. For his friends, up until then, had never pressured him and he never utilized the knowledge. One thing he knew he would stay away from, though,

La Leyenda *The Legend*

was alcohol. No matter what anyone said, he would never take a drink in his life.

It seemed that James Henry, just like his mother, was on the way to disaster, but even in the most despondent situations, there still remains a dim light of possibility. Life has an unusual way of putting certain people in the right place at the right time. That's just what life did when Hope Henson walked into James's English class.

It was the first period of the first day of school, and already James was regretting being there. It was fun walking around the building with his friends, but now that he was in class, he wished he had never seen the room. Sitting at his desk and waiting for the bell to ring and the day to start, James looked down solemnly. None of his friends were in this class and he felt rather awkward.

"Welcome to seventh grade," the teacher began. She was a tall lady with a long, brown dress. Her curly, brown hair barely brushed past her shoulders and bounced along happily as she twisted her head from side to side.

After the teacher had moved everyone so they were in alphabetical order, she started the "first day of school" speech. James looked around the room at the other children. Most of them were smiling, but he could not figure out why. Laughing in his mind as the girl next to him took notes, he rested his head in his hand, which was propped up by his arm on the old wooden desk, barely listening as the woman rattled on about the wonders of the Germanic language. James soon found his head slipping slowly, but surely forward, and jolted it back up when the brown dress moved right in front of him. He watched her intently and breathed a sigh of relief when he realized she had not noticed him slipping off into dreamland. For a second, he actually picked up on what she was talking about.

"The English language is a marvelous tool. It can take you far beyond places you thought you could never reach..." Her voice flowed like water in a fountain.

He then understood what amused the class so much. Her jittery movements and quick speech were quite entertaining, and her face resembled a carnival clown who had just eaten a can of coffee beans. James could definitely tell she was speaking, but he could no longer

Virginia Abernathy

hear words. She finally caught his attention when she mentioned the first assignment of the day.

"I want you to pick a person close to you and write a biography about them. You can include whatever you want, but it has to be about them. It doesn't have to be a novel, but at least a page is required."

What? James thought. *It's only the first day of school! She's already giving us stuff to do? I know right now I'm not going to like this teacher.*

Mrs. Jenkins began walking around the room, making sure that people were pairing up. James stared straight ahead, not sure who would want to talk to him. He could see through his peripheral vision that Mrs. Jenkins was inching her way towards him again. He had to pick *somebody*.

Looking to his left, he saw that everyone was already paired up.

What do I do? he thought.

Mrs. Jenkins was coming closer by the minute. James threw his arms up in silent frustration.

Why can't we just write about ourselves? About what we did during the summer? That's what we've always done before.

Suddenly, a voice broke his thoughts. "Uh...do you need a partner? I don't have one yet."

He turned to face a poorly dressed girl with long red, shabby hair and thick glasses. James did not know who she was. Looking to his left again, he hoped there would be someone standing there, also needing a partner. James did not really want to write about a girl, but if there was no one else...

"Are you two partners?" Mrs. Jenkins asked. James looked up at the teacher and then at the girl who was now looking down, feeling a little embarrassed.

"Well?" persisted the teacher, her bright yellow pencil tapping her clipboard.

"Uh...yeah. Yeah, we're partners," James replied.

The girl readjusted her glasses, looking up at James with a smile. Mrs. Jenkins nodded and checked something off her clipboard.

She stared at them for a second, wondering when they were going to begin. "Well, don't just sit there. You have a lot to write about.

La Leyenda The Legend

Get to work. Remember, a good student of the English language will always go far."

"Uhhh...yes Ma'am." James said, and turned back towards the girl, who was on his right. "Umm...I'm James," he said, reluctantly sticking out his hand.

"I'm Hope," she smiled sweetly, shaking it. As they shook hands, James glanced down at her desk and realized she hadn't been taking notes after all. She had been writing a letter to her father.

A sudden empathy, which had never been there before, overtook him. He wondered why she had to write to her father; why she had no friends; why she didn't wear nice clothes. Hope, too, was struck by James. She wanted to know why he dressed the way he did and why he seemed so lonely and far away. It was almost as if they were destined to meet; and after that, they were never seen apart.

Even though her name was Hope, there really did not appear to be much for her. She was an outcast because of the way she looked and dressed. Still, it was not her fault, and James soon found out why. Hope's father had died just a year ago, which was why she wrote him letters. Her mother did the best she could, but did not have a well-paying job. She simply could not afford to adorn Hope in the latest fashions. Thinking of his own family's financial situation, James could certainly relate. Unfortunately, junior high students just did not understand.

James did not know why he cared so much about Hope. There was something that drew him to her. She was the nicest person he had ever known, yet she was still an outcast. His friends were fun to hang out with, but he knew they would never be there like Hope would. She was a true friend to the end. Perhaps that was why James adored her.

It wasn't long after they had met, when James saw Hope leaving the band room with a black case in her hand. He almost yelled out her name to go talk to her, but then stopped. Outcasts were outcasts, but band geeks were a different breed. If it got around that he had been talking with one, he would be shunned forever. Looking left and right, he saw none of his crowd.

Virginia Abernathy

James then looked at Hope and realized he was being silly. Even though it seemed like longer, he only hesitated a moment before running after her. Who cared if they saw him? Why should anyone be excluded for anything? Nothing was wrong with playing an instrument. It was just another hobby; much better than the ones he had picked up, and he knew this to be true.

To his great relief, his friends never found out that Hope was in band. And even though James had found nothing wrong with it, he never told them.

That same week, Hope discovered something about James. She wondered why he suddenly started skipping classes and leaving school early. That Friday, her questions were answered.

"James!" she screamed, when she saw him light up after school one day. "What do you think you're doing?" She ran over to him and grabbed his cigarette. To say the least, James was surprised. "You *did* pass fifth grade, right?" she asked, sarcastically as she smashed the drug under her shoe.

"What?" James asked, still in shock from her initial outburst. He had never seen her so outspoken before.

"Fifth grade," she said again, angry. "We learned about drugs and stuff?"

James thought a minute and nodded. "Oh, fifth grade. Yeah, I remember."

"Well either you weren't paying attention or you've smoked so long you've forgotten."

James's eyebrows went down in confusion as he stared at his friend. He had only started smoking a few days ago. Hope sighed with frustration and began to make large gestures as she spoke.

"Taking drugs is about one of the most stupid things you could ever do! Not only are they illegal for you to take, but they kill you in the process. It's like you're begging to die a slow and painful death or get thrown in jail! I'm not asking, I'm telling; you need to stop this right now!" If anyone-other than James's friends-had been around, he was sure they would have applauded her.

"You know as well as I do that these things kill you before your time," she continued. "Is that what you want?"

La Leyenda *The Legend*

"Well, I...uh..."

"Listen, James, I know your friends pressured you into this, but it is far beyond the 'cool thing' to do. Okay?"

James opened his mouth to reply, but the words just would not come.

She continued lecturing him for half an hour about how stupid drugs were and how him taking them was even more stupid. The strange thing was, he was relieved. He wanted to be disciplined. He wanted to be yelled at and held accountable for his many sins. Now, finally, someone had come through.

Hope saved him from becoming addicted and convinced him that there was much more to life than trying to please some people who called you "buddy". James stopped smoking and shared this with his friends. They laughed and continued right on smoking. He did not tell them, however, what Hope's opinions of them were. Even though he would have done almost anything for Hope, he was not about to leave his friends on account of her; for he was too afraid of loneliness.

The year was long, but seemed to fly by, as many years seem to do. James was afraid that he might not be in any of Hope's classes next year. It never occurred to him that he might not be in any of his other friends' classes either. So, he did something that no one, not even Hope expected. He joined the eighth grade concert band. Since Hope would be in band, James was guaranteed at least one class with her. He decided to play trumpet because that's what Hope played. James had no idea what he was in for.

Hope moved over the summer to another state, and much to James' dismay, he was stuck. All alone in a class he was only taking so that he could see a girl who moved and he would never see again.

Not only that, once his friends found out that he had joined band, almost all of them abandoned him immediately. However, Hope did not completely disappear. They stayed in contact with one another through e-mail. Since James did not have a computer at home, several trips to the library were made so he could check his e-mail. He only wrote to Hope.

Virginia Abernathy

The first day of eighth grade concert band, James strolled into class one minute late. The others stared at his long, black, baggy pants and black shirt. With a few earrings and his spiked, blue hair, he just did not seem to fit in.

"Hello," the band director said, as James walked in, interrupting *his* "first day of school" speech. "Can I help you?"

"Yeah," James said, trying to be cool, but feeling awkward due to all of the many stares his peers were so coldly handing him. "Uhh...I have this class now, I think." James, of course, knew he had band, he just hoped that the schedule he now held in his hand was somehow mistaken.

"Okay," the teacher responded, looking through his roster, "what's your name?"

"Uhhh...Henry. James Henry." James looked around the room, while the teacher searched for his name. He even smiled and waved to a few students, who quickly avoided his glance by turning back around.

"Henry...Henry...ah! Yes, James Henry. Very well. Have a seat. Mr. Henry, I am Mr. Matthews."

James nodded as he sat in the very last row by himself. He was feeling rather uncomfortable at the moment and decided it would be best if he could just slip away, unnoticed by those who continued to stare at him.

After a few seconds, the other members of the class turned their attention back to the teacher in the front of the room who was now continuing his speech.

Mr. Matthews was a tall, skinny man with short, curly brown hair, friendly hazel eyes, and a large smile. He seemed nice to James and, much to his surprise, had a good sense of humor.

All of the band members, at least in that class, looked like young adults with their respectable attire. James figured they were all rich snobs, which of course was not true. They, on the other hand, figured James was a loser, which again was not the case.

At first, he had no friends. James talked to no one and no one talked to him. It was the worst, not to mention hardest class he had ever taken. James had never been able to read music before. He had

La Leyenda The Legend

played a few hand bells and a recorder in elementary school, but this was much harder.

It took him a couple of weeks to realize just how far behind he really was. Everyone, it seemed, had been playing their instruments since sixth grade. After two months of pure frustration, he had had enough.

One day after class, he knocked on the middle school band director's office door. The door creaked open with a push from James, who stared, appalled at the great mess before him. James might have not been the most well-dressed kid there, but he was certainly much neater than his teacher.

Papers covered the small carpeted room, as if they themselves were part of the floor. Styrofoam cups lined the long, wooden desk. Cups that once were filled with coffee, which kept the teacher company at night, when he still had a lot of work to finish. Posters of places the high school marching band had been covered the walls. As James looked around, he noticed a few, which had fallen to join the papers on the ground. James did not understand how anyone could possibly work in such a disorganized area.

Looking over at Mr. Matthews, who was typing away at his computer, James cleared his throat. A fan blew a few sheets of staff paper off a file cabinet. It was a loud fan, and the teacher was concentrating hard, so he did not hear James' knocking.

"Umm...Mr. Matthews?" James hesitated, his hand on the door knob.

"Huh?" he turned around in his black office chair. "James! What can I do for you?"

"Listen, I think you're a great teacher and all, but I don't think I can do band anymore." He shuffled his feet and stared awkwardly at the ground, waiting for a reaction from Mr. Matthews.

"But you just started!" Mr. Matthews said in astonishment.

"I know," James replied, softly, still staring at the strange pattern on the carpet, "but it's just not working out for me."

James peeked up to see a small grin come across Matthews' face.

"What's so funny?" he asked, becoming annoyed, "I'm serious."

Virginia Abernathy

"I know you are," his teacher said, still smiling. Mr. Matthews paused. He could tell James did not appreciate his reaction. "So, what's the problem?"

"Well, I...I just can't do it." James shifted his weight, his hand still attached to the door knob.

"What do you mean?" Mr. Matthews wanted to know. James sighed and a list of complaints flowed from his mouth like water rushing down a river.

"Well," he began, "I can't vibrate my lip that well, I don't remember the fingerings, and I can barely get out the octave higher than middle C. I still don't know what 'forte' means or what that little 'fp' stands for. I get 'D.C.' and 'D.S.' mixed up all the time. I don't know what the 'sign' looks like or what the 'coda' is. And why are there little dots above some notes and not the others?!"

"Articulation," Mr. Matthews replied calmly, standing up to turn off the fan behind him.

"What?" James asked, wondering if he had somehow changed the subject.

"Articulation," he repeated, turning back around to face his frustrated student. James thought a minute and still had no clue as to what he was talking about.

"What's artic-uh...?"

"Articulation is how the note is played. It could be the length of the note, or how strong you play it. Dots over or under a note tell you to play the notes short or separated, also known as staccato. Lines tell you to play the notes long, also known as tenuto. Long lines over many notes tell you to play the notes without tonguing them or without breathing. These are known as slurs or ties, depending on what notes the line is over. And carrots above the notes are accents. They tell you to play the note stronger than the unaccented ones." Mr. Matthews took one hand in the other as he waited for James' reply.

"Oh," he finally said, then held out his hands in confusion. "Well, what about the other weird words like an-andan-...?"

"Andante?" his teacher guessed, holding out his right hand.

"Yeah! What does an-dan-te mean?"

La Leyenda *The Legend*

Mr. Matthews put his hands in his pockets as he rattled off the definition. "Andante is a description word telling you how fast the song should go. It means slow-walking pace."

"Well, what about the other ones?" James asked, with an attitude.

"You mean like Allegro?" Mr. Matthews inquired, taking one hand out of his pocket and holding it out.

"Yeah, what does All...uh...what does that mean?"

"Allegro means fast. Moderato means moderate..."

"So, those words at the top of the song tell you how fast to go?"

"Most of the time. Sometimes they tell you how to play the song. And sometimes they aren't there at all." Mr. Matthews sat back down in his chair, facing James.

"What?"

"Well, sometimes composers don't indicate the tempo. They might just tell you the mood of the piece or how it should be played. They'll use words like cantabile, which means singing, or dolce, which means sweetly." The teacher placed his chin in his hand.

"So, am I suppose to memorize those?"

Mr. Matthews laughed. "That's the idea, yes."

There was a long pause of silence as James thought it over. He furrowed his brows and then decided it was just too confusing to think about.

"Listen, Jim," Mr. Matthews said, standing back up and putting a hand on his student's shoulder, "you've only been in band two months. That's about sixty days that you've tried to learn an instrument and learn to read music. That's not an easy task. When most of my students join eighth grade band, they've already been in band for two years. But you're not most of my students. You've got to give it time."

"But it's so hard," James complained.

"I never said it would be easy. In fact, I think learning to play an instrument and learning to play it well is extremely difficult. Maybe one of the hardest things you'll ever have to do. It takes time, patience, practice, and above all effort. You have to *want* to be good to *be* good."

"But if it's so hard," James asked, "why do people even bother doing it?" Mr. Matthews thought a moment before answering.

Virginia Abernathy

“Because,” he said, “once you’re good, you get so much out of it. It's hard to describe. It's not so much the fame or riches that some people consider rewards. It's more of a feeling you get. A wonderful feeling. Music is all about emotion. And when you realize that *you're* creating the emotion through your instrument...well, it's just a wonderful feeling. Not everyone has had that experience, and once you get it, you'll never forget it. And you'll never stop wanting more of it.” There was a long pause before Mr. Matthews made a suggestion. “Why don’t you stay after school for an hour or so and I’ll give you complimentary lessons on how to read music.”

“You will?” James asked, excitedly. At first, he was very pleased with the offer, but later he wondered why. He never really wanted to be in band in the first place. But now that he was in it, he decided he might as well do *something*. This was not at all like James, which made him wonder what had changed.

“Oh!” James said, remembering, “I ride the bus home.”

“Well, can your parents pick you up?” James looked at the floor in embarrassment. “They work late,” he muttered. He knew it was a lie, but could not think of anything else to say. Mr. Matthews stared at him, thinking.

“Where do you live?” he finally asked. James gave him a strange look.

“Off of Maple Street.”

“Really? That happens to be on my way home.” After a second or two Mr. Matthews continued. “Well, I can take you home after school...if your parents wouldn’t mind.” James gave him another strange look. It amazed him that an adult actually cared this much.

Despite the fact that he loathed going to band class everyday, he found himself saying, “Okay.”

“Okay,” Mr. Matthews repeated. “I’ll see you at 2:30 tomorrow.”

“Right,” James said, walking away backwards. “2:30 to 3:30.” He turned around and Mr. Matthews' gaze followed him. Suddenly James stopped, and turned back towards his band director. “Hey, Mr. Matthews...thanks.”

“No problem, Jim,” he responded, and then walked back into his office. James stood there, astounded at what had just happened. He went there with the initial intent of telling Mr. Matthews that he was

La Leyenda *The Legend*

quitting and never coming back, and Mr. Matthews stood right there and convinced him that this decision was not what he really wanted.

“How cool is that!” James whispered to himself. Even though he was not exactly sure about anything at that moment, he smiled, and then walked away.

Chapter 2

“A crescendo means to progressively increase the volume.”

“In other words,” James said, holding out his hands, “get louder?”

It was the first lesson and, much to James's surprise, he was not bored. In fact, he absorbed every bit of knowledge like a sponge.

“Right,” Mr. Matthews replied, “but do it gradually.” James nodded his head with understanding.

His eyes wandered around the band room, while Mr. Matthews stared at a piece of paper with musical terms and definitions on it. Matthews knew he would not be able to remember everything, so he had made a list an hour earlier.

The circular room with its long, circular steps reminded James of a mini football stadium. Mr. Matthews and James were sitting in two chairs at the bottom of the room, where the band director stood during class.

“A decrescendo, on the other hand,” Matthews continued, still focused on the paper, “means to do just the opposite.” James gave him a confused look. “Get gradually softer,” Mr. Matthews explained.

“Now, take your trumpet, start out soft, and get gradually louder.” James did, but could not get as loud as he wanted. It was rather frustrating and he wanted to try again in hopes of improving, but Mr. Matthews continued.

“Once you get better,” he explained, “you’ll be able to get louder and softer. Another thing that will help is if you breathe from your diaphragm and not your shoulders. That way, you can take in more air and it will help you make your notes louder or softer.”

James just stared at him, dumbfounded. Mr. Matthews laughed a little when he saw his expression.

“Look,” he motioned towards his stomach, “your diaphragm is right here, below your lungs.” He placed his hand over his diaphragm to show James its location. “It pushes on your lungs so that you can breathe better. Unfortunately, not many use it.” He inhaled and his

Virginia Abernathy

stomach imitated that of a large balloon. James jerked back a little and stared at him in amazement.

"You see that?" Mr. Matthews asked. "That's how you are suppose to breathe when you play any wind instrument; not up in your shoulders like you're used to breathing. It's hard at first, but once you can do it well, you'll be able to take fewer breaths and your notes will sound better. Now, try pushing your stomach out and breathing with your diaphragm."

James just stared at him strangely and said nothing.

"Oh, come on," Mr. Matthews sighed, throwing his hands in the air, "it's not that bad!"

James continued staring, and after a moment replied softly, "I'll look like I'm pregnant."

Mr. Matthews laughed as he put his hand to his forehead. He looked up after a moment and said, "Jim, I don't think you need to worry about that. Besides, no one is going to see you. It's just you and me. I promise not to tell anyone that you tried to breathe correctly. Now, come on, try it."

After a few seconds, James finally complied and found it to be very weird. It did not feel like more air had entered his body; it just felt strange. He was beginning to wonder if Mr. Matthews actually knew what he was talking about.

His band director, being as observant as he was, could tell that James did not think this new breathing technique was any good.

"Just a second," he said, standing up, "I'll go get my trombone to help demonstrate." He walked out of the band room and into his disorderly office. James stared at the floor, holding the trumpet and patiently waiting for his return.

Mr. Matthews was taking a long time and James's attention span was waning ever so quickly. So, he decided to try this breathing thing on his own while waiting for his teacher. James picked up his trumpet, and right as he was about to blow, saw someone in the corner of his eye standing in the doorway. He quickly put down the trumpet as if he never meant to play it.

"So it's true," said the kid outside the band room, wearing all black. His blue pointed hair shifted left to right as he talked and the ring on his tongue clicked with every syllable.

La Leyenda The Legend

"Oh, hi Kenny," James said, embarrassed, hoping to find a way to change the subject. "What's up?"

"I didn't believe them, but I guess it's true," Kenny replied, completely ignoring James's futile attempt to redeem himself in Kenny's eyes.

"What?" James asked innocently. Then he looked back down at the floor, like a child who had just been caught stealing from the cookie jar.

"What!" Kenny scoffed and James face turned a light shade of red.

Kenny was once a good friend of James who did not, at least until that moment, believe that he had joined the band. "I had such faith in you, Jimbo. Such faith."

James looked back up to see Mr. Matthews, now with trombone in hand, standing behind Kenny. The boy continued, hardly able to contain his laughter.

"You said that band was dumb and I actually believed you. But I guess there's no hiding it now. You really are a band geek!"

"Young man!" Mr. Matthews' voice had taken on an authoritative and rather perturbed tone. Kenny, unaware of the teacher's presence until now, swung around in horror to face him. "Maybe once you've matured a little you'll better understand the difficulties involved with what Jim is trying to accomplish. Perhaps after you have learned what consideration is, you won't be so apt to make fun of others who can do things that you can't. But until then, we are very busy and you need to leave!"

"Geez! I didn't mean any harm," the boy said, apologetically. Kenny stuffed his hands in his pockets and looked around, trying his best to avoid Mr. Matthews' glare. He noticed the trumpet in James's hand. It seemed like a shiny, gold trophy, one that he'd never have the pleasure of holding. Image meant too much to him. He moved behind Mr. Matthews and looked back up at him. "I just wanted to see if it was true. That's all." With that, he disappeared from sight.

James looked down at the floor in embarrassment. Now that the truth about his friends and his past ideas on band had been aired, he waited for Mr. Matthews to tell him to "get out" or that they were "finished for today," even though they still had fifteen minutes left,

Virginia Abernathy

but Mr. Matthews did not say anything. Instead, he waited a moment until he had his emotions under control and then walked down the steps and sat down in the chair across from James.

He picked up his trombone. "Now, before we were so rudely interrupted...watch as I play."

James looked up, relieved that he was not going to be blamed or judged for the incident.

"I'm first going to breathe from my shoulders and play the note as long as I can. Then I'm going to breathe from my diaphragm. Tell me if you hear a difference."

James nodded as he played his second note.

"Tell me what was different," Mr. Matthews said.

"Well, the second note was longer and it was louder...I guess."

"Now," Mr. Matthews continued, "take your trumpet and first breathe from your shoulders and play middle C. Then, breathe from your diaphragm and play it. Tell me if you notice a difference."

James picked up his trumpet, blew twice, and definitely noticed a difference.

After a month of "complimentary lessons," James was still not satisfied. He walked to Mr. Matthews' office before school one day to tell him, once again, that band was just not working out for him.

James found his teacher bent over a large pile of staff paper. He was scribbling notes very frantically and seemed to be concentrating hard. James was almost afraid to interrupt him.

Looking around the room uncomfortably, waiting to be recognized, James noticed that all of the posters were back on the wall and the floor had been picked up. This made him feel a little better. He had always been a neat kid, but music was starting to make him a perfectionist.

However, James noticed that the styrofoam cups had doubled in number on his teacher's desk. It looked like a fortified city, which bore a resemblance to Jericho. James started wondering how hard he would have to stomp his foot to make the city collapse. He finally

La Leyenda *The Legend*

realized that he would have to say something or stand there forever staring at the magnificent wall of cups.

"Ummm...Mr. Matthews?" he asked meekly as he shuffled his feet.

After a second, the teacher looked up and smiled.

"James! What can I do for you?" He pushed his manuscript back and turned to face his student.

"Ummm...well...it's been three months and I'm still not any better than I was when I started," he declared, after some trouble.

"You're not?" Mr. Matthews tried to keep himself from grinning this time.

"No, and I just don't think I'll ever get better. Maybe band is just not my thing."

Mr. Matthews could not help but smile a little at this. He could tell James was not pleased with it, and he tried to hide it as best he could.

"Jim, when you first started band, what could you do?"

James looked at him, puzzled. The man was definitely a mystery.

"What could I do?"

"Yeah, what were you able to do, relating to band, when you first started my class?" Mr. Matthews folded his hands in his lap, awaiting James's response.

"Well...uh...nothing."

"Okay, so what can you do now?"

James stared at him again, still puzzled as to what he was getting at. "Well...I can read music sorta, and..."

"Then you've improved," Mr. Matthews said plainly, crossing his legs and resting his arm on his desk.

James hesitated a second, thinking about this. "Yeah, but..."

"James, if I told you to play your C scale, do you think you could do it?"

"Of course I could," he replied in a "duh" tone. *Wasn't he there when he showed me how to play it?* James thought, still confused.

"Well, then you *must* have improved," Mr. Matthews declared, uncrossing his legs.

James looked down at his feet, thinking it over.

Virginia Abernathy

"Look, James, I know it's not where you want to be, and that's good, but it's definitely a step forward." After a pause of silence, Mr. Matthews asked, "Do you remember what I told you a month ago about what it takes to be able to play an instrument well?" James thought a minute, but could not reply. Mr. Matthews answered for him. "I said it takes time, patience, practice, and effort. Time doesn't mean a couple of months. It means a couple of years."

"Years!" James blurted out.

"I told you it wasn't easy," Mr. Matthews said, as he picked up his staff paper and dropped them back on the desk to straighten them.

"Yeah, but I didn't know it would take years!" *Is this guy nuts?* James thought. *How much time does he think I have?*

"Patience is something you definitely need to work on," Mr. Matthews laughed. James was starting to think that his teacher was not taking him seriously.

"But I'm tired," James whined.

"I can understand that, but if you get tired so easily after three months, you're going to be exhausted after six. That's just half the year. You won't make it. You need to have more patience. Realize that it will take awhile. No one picks up an instrument for the first time and plays it well. No one! Another thing that you need to do is practice."

"I do practice," James said defensively.

"When?" Mr. Matthews asked, smiling.

James was starting to get irritated with his teacher. He did not want to be lectured, he just wanted to quit band.

"Everyday in band and after school. You know that!"

"That's not practicing, Jim, that's rehearsal and lessons. That's me teaching you. Now you have to apply what you've learned by practicing."

"Well, don't I do that in band?" he asked, holding out his hands.

"You do, but it's not enough. If you're so worried about being good, practicing is the best thing you can do. Now, everyday I take you home and everyday you leave your trumpet in your locker. So, unless it's playing itself and then teaching you what it learned the next day..."

La Leyenda *The Legend*

"Well, why didn't you tell me earlier that I needed to take it home?"

"I do!" he laughed. "Everyday in band class when you're not listening!" James let out a big sigh as Matthews continued. "And it's not just a matter of taking it home. You also need to take it out of the case and *play* it. Practice it. Unless of course it starts playing itself again."

"Well, that's boring," James complained, throwing his hands into the air.

"How do you know?" his teacher smirked. "You've never done it before."

"Well..." James started, and found himself at a loss for words. "It *sounds* boring," he finished his sentence.

"Boring or not, it's necessary." After a moment of silence, Mr. Matthews asked, "Do you want to be good?"

"Yes," James replied immediately. Even though he knew it was true, he still could not understand why. It was never his intention to be a great player. The only reason he joined band was to see Hope. That was all it was. But the minute he realized that he was on his own again, he subconsciously decided to make the best of the situation. He still had yet to tell his conscious self of this decision, so the confusion remained.

"Fine," Mr. Matthews said, breaking James's train of thoughts, "then do the things that will make you good."

Suddenly the bell rang. James had to go to first period. He started leaving slowly, wondering if the conversation was over.

"I'll see you at 2:30," Mr. Matthews finally said, turning back towards his composition. With that, James nodded and left.

It was 3:30 and James was packing up his things. Mr. Matthews was in his office doing the same. As they made their way to the car in silence, James looked out at the high school in the distance. He would be going there someday. It was such a large, intimidating building. James began to wonder if he would remain in band through high school.

Virginia Abernathy

The red truck was covered in snow from that morning and Mr. Matthews got out his scraper and began working on the windshield. As he worked, he said, “Jim, let’s make a deal.” Interested, James listened. “You take your instrument home for this month. Play it thirty minutes everyday, but it has to be *everyday*, even on the weekends.”

James sighed and shoved his hands into his pockets. Mr. Matthews could tell that his student was not at all impressed with his “deal” so far.

“Now, listen,” he said, trying to sell James on it, “thirty minutes is not very long. Think about it. There’s twenty-four hours in a day. You sleep, what, eight of that? Then you go to school for about seven hours, almost eight since you stay after school. So that’s sixteen hours from twenty-four, which is...another eight hours. And out of that eight I’m asking you to sacrifice thirty minutes. Now, is that too much to ask?”

James thought about it, but did not respond. Mr. Matthews always had a way of making things sound better than they really were. He waited for James’s reply. When he realized he was not going to receive any, he continued.

“Now, if you play for thirty minutes everyday for just this month and still haven’t improved, then you can forget this practicing thing. I won’t bother you about it anymore. In fact,” he added, getting a new idea, “tomorrow afternoon we can make a tape of you playing a song. Then, in a month, we’ll make another tape of you playing the exact same song. If you don’t hear a direct improvement, I won’t bug you about practicing. But, you have to be honest and really practice hard for thirty minutes. Don’t miss one day.” Suddenly, he stopped and held out his hand. “Is it a deal?” James shook his teacher’s hand reluctantly.

“Deal...I guess.” *This will be easy to win, James thought. There’s no way I’m going to improve in just a month. No matter how much I practice. There’s just no way. He’s crazy. I like him, but he’s definitely crazy.*

James had not yet come to realize that sometimes adults actually know what they are talking about; he was in for a surprise. However, he did everything Mr. Matthews had said.

La Leyenda *The Legend*

Saying thanks to Mr. Matthews, James walked up the driveway to his house. Waving goodbye, he stepped on the porch then proceeded to the door. It was a white, two-story house that leaned to the right a little, which was understandable, since it was on top of a steep hill. The paint was chipping and the sides of the house was enveloped by ivies. The front porch was covered in wet, dead leaves from the gutter and other assorted debris. James stepped over glass bottles and knew his mother, though he had not seen her, must have come home last night.

He looked out over the yard, which actually appeared decent for a change due to the snow covering the dead grass. The three trees on their front lawn were old and dying from lack of care. It was rather depressing to see in the spring and summer. The only thing pleasant was a bird feeder, which Alex, his brother, had set out years ago on one of the trees in the front yard. This feeder seemed to be Alex's haven, for he was constantly cleaning it out. On a piece of paper, which was by the window where the feeder could be seen, Alex had written the names of all of the different species that had visited it.

James opened the door and for some reason thought about how easy it would be to break in. The door had a lock, but it did not work.

Not much to steal, he thought, as he entered the old home. James was always the only one home when he was awake. His brother worked long hours and his mother came home late. So, when she arrived that same day at 4:45, it caught him off guard.

He was in his room, sitting on his bed with a chair in front of him. The chair acted as his music stand, and a music book was propped up on it. In the middle of trying to play an F major scale, he was interrupted by a shoe that had just been thrown at him.

"Mom!" he exclaimed, shocked. He quickly stood up and turned towards his assailant.

"Shut up playing that dumb noise!" she yelled, her words slurring together. James could tell she was drunk. Finding it difficult to stand on her own, she held onto his door frame. Her blue eyes were glazed

Virginia Abernathy

over and her black hair was a mess, going every way possible. Her skinny figure and pale skin was enough to make a person ill.

"Why are you home so early?" he asked, worried about her job and wondering if she even cared.

"Left early!" she yelled. "Can't I leave early from my own job?"

"Why'd you leave early? Won't you get fired?"

"Boss told me to go on home. So I went to Joe's early. Joe's a nice fella. Have you ever met Joe? Such a nice fella. Yeah, I really like Joe." Joe's was the bar that his mother visited everyday. "Well, anyways, I didn't come home to hear you's mak'n such a racket. Person can't think with all this noise. All this noise. All this noooissee!"

If she had been sober, her voice would have sounded rather pleasant. It was a rich, deep voice, but at that moment it sounded like demons to James. Demons who had taken over his mother's body and simply wouldn't let go. How James wished he could hear that pleasant, rich voice say something nice again.

"Mom, I have to practice," James protested.

"Well then go outside!" his mother replied as she swayed back and forth in his doorway. "There's plen'y of room outside for your dumb noise. Don't wake the neighbors, Jim. They call me yesterday to complain 'bout your dumb noise. We don't want no trouble or noth'n."

James sighed and rolled his eyes. "They were complaining about you throwing your bottles on their lawn, Mom."

"Don't talk back to me! I don't wan' a hear it. Go outside!" With that, she slowly made her way to her bedroom and flopped down lifelessly on top of the bed. Immediately she was asleep and began snoring.

James decided that it was not worth arguing with a drunk. As it had just recently snowed, he compromised and went to the garage.

Two 'o clock in the morning, James awoke to the sound of breaking glass and shrill screams. He crawled out of his bed to the old, wooden steps to find his mother and brother fighting. It was a horrible fight. James wished he could sneak out of the house and never return, but he was too frightened to move. Listening as they argued, he gasped as his mother threw a plate to the floor.

La Leyenda *The Legend*

"Great!" Alex yelled. "That's just what I need! Another mess to clean up! It's not like there aren't enough messes in this house!" Alex had been washing the dishes when their mother woke up and confronted him downstairs.

"Wonderful!" their mother retorted. "After that you can work on the kitchen!" She stomped out of the kitchen and into the family room. The two rooms were connected without a door in between.

"Oh, shut up, Angela."

She quickly turned back towards her oldest son. "Don't tell your mother to shut up! And don't call me Angela. You're starting to sound like Jeff."

"How would you know what Jeff sounds like? You were never sober enough to hear him."

"You take that back!" Angela screamed. And then she cried, "I loved Jeff."

"Drunks can't love!"

Alex's mother looked up, with fury in her bloodshot eyes. She wanted to attack him, but knew he was much too strong for her.

"Give me the money," she finally said after a moment of silent glares. "I want the money!"

"Drop dead!" Alex yelled, as he turned back to the sink. "In fact, I wish you would."

"I need it!" she yelled, stumbling, taking more and more steps towards him.

"What you need is time in jail."

Suddenly, she tried a different approach. "Alex," she asked sweetly, "why are you being so mean to your mother?"

Alex dried his hands, stomped over to the refrigerator, and swung open the door. "Look, Mom. Look!"

The mother turned to face the angry, young man. "What?" she asked, bitterly.

"Do you see any food, Mom? There's no food! And do you know why there's no food? It's because you spend all of our money on booze. And now you want me to give you more? How are we suppose to live without a single thing to eat? Who knows how long it's been since James has had a decent meal."

Virginia Abernathy

"Don't bring him into this, boy." Angela nearly fell, but caught herself just in time.

"Mom, he lives right up there." Alex pointed towards the stairway, and James moved back, afraid his presence would be discovered. "How can I *not* bring him into this?"

"Well who cares, anyway? I can't live without it! I need it! You just got paid, Alex. Now where's the money?" She held out her hand and moved closer to him.

"I can't fix your addictions every time you get an urge! Where's the money you earn from working hard everyday?" he asked sarcastically.

"I don't have any!" she cried.

"Do you know why?" he yelled, hatred steaming inside of him. "It's because you spend it on crap like booze instead of food and things that you need. You don't *need* alcohol, Mom. You just think you do. The minute you realize that, I might start to respect you a little."

"You're just mad 'cause I almost got fired," she stated matter-of-factly.

"You're certainly right I'm mad! How can you have the nerve to go in there drunk? You've got a family! You have a son that still needs to be taken care of! How *could* you pull such a stunt! You're lucky he didn't fire you. I know I would've in a heart beat."

Angela laughed as she thought about her boss's reaction when she first walked into his office to ask him what she needed to do that day.

"You should've seen him!" she boasted. "He needs me! That's what it is! He can't fire me! I'm his whole life!"

Alex stood there, disgusted with his mother.

Angela noticed the look, and fury overtook her again. "That's more than I can say about you, Alex! I don't need you or James! All he does is make a bunch of stupid noise and all you do is watch stupid birds! I don't even need Jeff! In fact, I'm glad he's gone!"

"That's enough, Mother," Alex whispered bitterly.

"What'd he ever do for me except hide the money just like you're doing."

"I said, that's enough." Alex could not take the insulting of Jeff any longer.

La Leyenda *The Legend*

"I'll tell you when it's enough!" Angela yelled, now in her son's face. "Neither you or Jeff is smart enough to know that anyway. And I mean that! Why, if I could, I'd have him die all over again!"

Suddenly, Alex's hand flew out of control as he slapped his mother across the face. She fell to the floor and let out a soft scream.

"I don't blame Jeff for leaving," Alex said, in almost a whisper, but loud enough that Angela heard it. "I just wish he could've taken me and James with him." Alex left his mother on the kitchen floor and entered the family room.

Angela glared at him. Standing up swiftly, she ran after her son. Alex caught her as she fell into him. She then punched him in the stomach and he threw her hard towards the broken couch, not at all worried about hurting her. Angela screamed loudly and started ripping the couch to shreds. Alex did not even look back. He quickly headed for the stairs.

James jumped up and ran into his room, closing the door behind him. He pulled the covers over his head and hoped Alex had not seen him. Suddenly, his older brother burst into the room.

"Mom's hav'n her fit again," he said with frustration. James just stared at him, like a deer caught in someone's headlights. "It's worse tonight 'cause she almost got fired," his brother continued. "Went to work drunk. Dumb broad. Cares more about herself than her own family. Maybe not even herself. And then, to top it off, she was awake when her fix wore off. Now she's begg'n me for money. Well, I'm not gonna give it to her."

They stared at each other for a minute; James totally dumbfounded, and his brother more casual than James would have been in a moment like that. It was almost as if he did this every night.

"Well?" he said, "come on. You don't want to be here when she works her way into your room. She's never done it before, but she's so riled up tonight, you might just come back and find your room's been annihilated." James just sat there, not knowing what to do, while his mother screamed wildly in the other room.

"Well, come on," his brother beckoned, "let's go for a drive and talk. I need to cool down and I never get to see you anyway." At least he was trying to make something good out of a bad situation.

Virginia Abernathy

James stood up and started to put on his shoes. Alex noticed the black case by the bed. Much to James's surprise, he recognized what it was.

"You might wanna take that," he said, pointing to the case and suddenly realizing what his mother had meant when she said James played "stupid noise". "She might try to sell it to a pawn shop." James gave him a frightened look. Alex stared back to let him know he was not kidding. "Get your piggy bank too, or wherever you keep any money."

"I don't have any money," James whispered.

"Good," Alex said, walking out of the room, "then she can't spend it."

They sneaked out of the house while their mother destroyed it; breaking glass and ripping up furniture. Alex, started the car and drove away to no particular destination.

"I didn't really want to wake you up," he said, turning a corner. "I know you have school tomorrow and I have to get up at 5:30. But I was just afraid she might do something crazy. I didn't want you to be in the middle of it. It's not our fault she's a drunk and almost lost her job. After all, I'm working my butt off so that we don't lose the house. She thinks she's the only one who's had it hard?" He shook his head, disgusted with the person of whom he was speaking.

"What if she hurts herself?" James asked, worried.

"What do you care?" Alex scoffed. "It's not like she really worries about you. Better her than us." That really hurt James. Even though Alex had a right to be angry, she was still their mother. For a while there was awkward silence between them.

"What are ya gonna do?" Alex shrugged, finally. "If you try and get close to her she'll beat you half to death. Just got to wait 'till she passes out. When we get home she'll be asleep. Then we can clean up and put her in bed."

There was another long pause of silence. Suddenly James realized that he had never actually had a conversation with his brother. Even though they lived at the same house, they never saw each other. James left for school at 7:00 and his brother left for work at 6:00. When Alex returned at 1:00 a.m., James was always asleep. They just never had time together. Alex also worked on the

La Leyenda *The Legend*

weekends. He had two jobs, so he worked a lot more than he really should have for a twenty-one year old.

"So, how's your life been?" he asked abruptly.

"I don't know," James responded, glumly.

"How'd you get the money for the trumpet?"

At first, James wondered how he knew, and then realized that the trumpet case probably gave him a clue.

"Well, the band director loaned it to me. As long as I'm a student, they will loan you instruments."

"So, you're in band?" he sounded surprised. "You gonna play that thing in high school?"

"Well, I'm not sure if I'll be in band next year."

"You should," Alex replied and then the car was silent again.

"You know, I never would've expected that from you," Alex said. James looked at him confused and Alex decided to explain. "You know, you joining band and all." James still wondered what he meant, but chose not to question him.

"So, how is it?" Alex asked.

"How's what?"

"Band."

"Oh! It's...okay." James looked out the window and watched the stars fly by in the black sky.

"Just okay?"

"Yeah. I really like the band director. His name is..."

"Matthews?" Alex finished.

"Yeah," James said, staring at him in surprise. "How did you...?"

"I was in middle school once too, ya know."

After a pause, Alex continued his friendly interrogation. "So, what do you like about him?"

"Well, he's really nice and..." James was almost afraid to continue, but then decided Alex could not get mad at him for what he wanted to say.

"Yes?" Alex prodded.

"Well...he reminds me of Jeff."

Alex smiled, much to James's relief. "Why?" he wanted to know.

"Well, I don't know. He's really nice and he cares about me. I know that sounds weird, but..."

Virginia Abernathy

"No it doesn't," Alex reassured him.

James continued. "You know how you got in a lot of fights when you were in high school?"

Alex nodded, "Yeah, I was an angry kid."

"Well, Jeff helped you out and that's what Mr. Matthews is doing for me. Except, I'm not fighting and all. I'm just trying to play trumpet."

"Do you like it?" Alex asked, turning another corner.

James was reluctant to be honest, but could not lie to his brother. "Yeah," he finally managed to say. "It's not as bad as I thought it would be."

"What made you join in the first place?"

James eyes widened. Now he refused to be honest. "Well...uh...it doesn't really matter."

Alex laughed a little, but decided to let it stay at that.

"I'm glad that I joined, though," James continued.

"Really?"

"Yeah. Even though I lost all of my friends and now no one will talk to me, unless they're making fun of me, I did gain one really good friend."

"Oh, yeah? Who's that?"

"Mr. Matthews," James said, surprised that Alex did not already know from his previous comments.

"That's nice, Jim," Alex smiled. "I'm really glad."

They continued driving in silence for thirty more minutes before Alex finally said, "Okay, she should be done by now; at least I hope."

He drove home and they cautiously pushed the door open. Everything was silent, but the creaking of the door. They walked into the family room and there was their mother, sprawled out over the couch with a bleeding hand due to a broken vase. Glass was everywhere. Alex went up to her and smirked.

"Sleeping peacefully," he whispered in a sarcastic tone. "Come on," he ordered James, "help me get her in bed." James obeyed and they laid her in her bed and cleaned and bandaged her hand. They did not see any more cuts. They then proceeded to the family room to clean up the mess she had made. The clock on the wall read 4:00 when they finally went back to bed.

La Leyenda *The Legend*

During that month, James made sure to practice everyday; sometimes more than thirty minutes. It was funny, once he would start playing, he would often lose track of the time. One day, he played for nearly an hour, but had to stop because his lips were tired. Even through all of his practicing, he was still convinced that nothing about his playing had changed.

James was sitting with Mr. Matthews in the band room after school when he was asked to play the same song he had played a month before. After recording the song, James listened to his interpretation of it at the beginning of the month and cringed. Then the tape continued and he heard the song he had just played. He had to admit, it sounded a lot better.

“So?” Mr. Matthews asked, “What do you think?”

“It’s better,” James admitted reluctantly.

“And how could it not be?” his band director wanted to know. “For thirty days you played it over and over again. If you practiced, which I know you did, it’s almost impossible *not* to improve.”

“Well,” James said hesitantly, “I guess you win. I’ll practice more.” He tried to sound disappointed, but was actually pleased with the outcome. James discovered that practicing was not really all that bad.

“At least thirty minutes everyday would be good,” Mr. Matthews said. “And once you get real good, you can start playing for an hour or an hour and a half.” James eyes widened.

“Well,” he replied, “I think for now I’ll stick with thirty minutes.”

Chapter 3

That Friday, James was walking through the cafeteria, looking for a place to sit. The small lunch room was always crowded and it was such a burden to find a seat. Students carrying yellow styrofoam trays with mashed potatoes and chicken nuggets walked around him. Their footsteps echoed off of the tile floor and their voices clamored against the white walls. He walked slowly as his eyes searched the room. James was so busy searching, he did not notice the foot that caused him more embarrassment than he could realize as the food went flying into the air.

For a few seconds, everyone who saw the incident was silent. James sat up, his nose a little bloody from the fall. Looking around for his assailant, he realized that all of the people around him used to be his friends. People dressed in black, with chains and multicolored hair stared at him with unfriendly eyes.

“Band geek!” some called out.

“Nerd! Band geek! Traitor!”

It was only eighth grade and no one would remember it in ninth. They were just stupid names that James knew were not true. Many years later he would look back and realize it was not that big of a deal. He might even start laughing at the mere thought of it. Nevertheless, at that particular moment, he felt as if the whole world had just crashed in on him.

People continued yelling and, as he stood up, someone started throwing french fries at him. He ran away, with his hand under his dripping nose. Everyone else just laughed. Surprisingly enough, none of the teachers saw.

James almost did not go to band during sixth period that day. He was so ashamed. It was then that he knew, as he usually did, that he would be friendless forever.

Mr. Matthews waited for him half an hour after school that day, but when James never came, he started working on something else. He was worried, but did not know where to find James at such a late

Virginia Abernathy

hour. *Perhaps he forgot and went on home*, Mr. Matthews decided, but figured that probably wasn't the case. Matthews left at 4:30, hoping James was all right.

When James arrived home, he sat down on his bed and stared at his trumpet.

Why? he thought. *Why do people have to be so mean to me? I didn't do anything to them. I guess I made a mistake. I never should've joined this stupid band!*

"I hate playing trumpet!" he said aloud, and then thought about it. Was it the trumpet he hated, or the persecution? He rested his head in his hands.

"Why did Hope have to leave? Everything would be fine if she had stayed here. She wouldn't have laughed. I miss her."

They had written several letters to each other at first, but soon the letters became less and less frequent. It seemed that they were starting to forget each other, even though that was not true. After a few more minutes of melancholy memories, he finally decided to practice.

He put a chair in front of where he was sitting and pulled his music book from his backpack. James stood up to play his trumpet, but right as he was about to blow, put it back down. He could not do it. Not after what had happened to him today. How was he going to face his classmates tomorrow? They would probably think of cute names to call him, like French Fry Boy. No, he could not play the trumpet *ever* again.

He sat back on his bed in defeat and buried his head in his hands. Right at that moment, as if he had slipped off into a dream, he saw Matthews standing there, holding his trombone.

It takes time, patience, practice, and above all effort. You have to want to be good to be good.

"But they won't let me!" James cried aloud, to the imaginary figure he saw in his head.

No, the figure replied, *you won't let you. Do you want to be good?*

"Yes!" James declared.

Then do the things that will make you good.

La Leyenda *The Legend*

James looked up. The image had left his mind, but the voice of his teacher remained.

Do the things that will make you good...

With those words now continually running through his head like a message on the bottom of a TV screen, James picked up his trumpet and began to play. As he played, he became lost in the melody. He closed his eyes and was no longer reading the notes. Instead, he felt the music.

It wasn't thirty minutes later when Angela came through the door. She had left work an hour earlier to go to Joe's and was now home, ready to ruin her son's life. The minute she heard the trumpet sound, she raced into his room, pushing him.

"Put it away!" she screamed as James fell to the floor, holding on tightly to the instrument. When he had sat back up, he quickly started to obey. "All you do is play that crappy thing! That won't help you get you anywheres! Stop playing and get a real job! Stop playing! Stop playing!"

She proceeded to kick the trumpet case around the room, while screaming out curses that even James had never heard of. Suddenly, her son was full of rage.

She can't do that to my trumpet! He grabbed his mother's shoulders and pulled her away from his instrument.

"Don' touch me!" she yelled, and then started to hit her son as hard as she possibly could. She pushed him down and began kicking him. "Stupid boy! Stupid idiot boy! You're worthless and I hate you! Quit playing! Stupid boy!"

"Mom!" James cried, "Stop!" Angela was so busy cursing, she did not hear his pleas; though if she had, it wouldn't have mattered.

James wished that Alex would burst in and save him from this crazy, drunken excuse for a mother; but he knew better. She continued to kick him until he finally stopped moving. James realized that the more he fought, the harder she would fight back; so, he stopped altogether.

Virginia Abernathy

She stared at her limp son, lying on the floor and found him to be the most pitiful creature. A skinny, pale stick was all she saw on the carpet, for she had drunk her compassion away. Soon after, she left and fell on her bed; passed out from exhaustion.

James laid there, on the floor; his nose bleeding again and every part of his body aching. He began to cry. Why was it impossible for him to have a normal life? Why was he not allowed to do what he wanted to do? All he really wanted was to play the trumpet. That was all he wanted. It was the one thing he could control and the one thing he could improve. It was an escape from the horrible reality he was forced to face each and every day. It was his, and no one could take it from him.

He stopped crying. Rage surged through him again. Slowly standing, he wiped his eyes, and glared at the trumpet inside its case.

You, he thought. *You're the reason my life sucks. It's your fault.* Racing over to his trumpet case, he picked it up, and threw it across the room. James thought that would make him feel better, but immediately after throwing it, a great feeling of regret rushed over him. He turned around, looking desperately for something to do. Seeing his backpack by the bed, he quickly unzipped it and pulled out his math book. Opening to page 103, he laid down on the bed and started doing homework.

James did not practice for the rest of that weekend. He also did not show up to band class on Monday or Tuesday. Mr. Matthews soon discovered that James had been skipping. While taking attendance, he asked the students if they had seen James.

"Yeah," said one of the saxophonists, "he was in my last class."

"Well, did he have an early dismissal?"

"No, at least I don't think so."

It was Wednesday and James had not gone to band or stayed after school for three days. Concerned and a little angry, Mr. Matthews decided to call the secretary to find out what class James had during his break.

"Hi, Linda? This is Tom Matthews. Could you do me a favor? I was wondering if you could find out what class one of my students is in right now..."

La Leyenda *The Legend*

It was half past eleven when an unhappy James knocked on the band teacher's door. He had been practically shoved out of his math class by Mr. South who insisted that the algebra movie they had been watching for fun was really not all that important.

"James," Mr. Matthews said solemnly, opening the door. Already the boy could tell he was in for a lecture and a half. Mr. Matthews even had a chair waiting for him. After they both sat down, his teacher crossed his legs and stared at his student for a minute, though to James it seemed like an hour.

James glanced at the wooden desk and saw that Mr. Matthews had been writing a song of some sort. It was sprawled out over his desk, with eraser and pencil marks covering it.

"So," Mr. Matthews began, causing James's eyes to change position, "where have you been lately?"

"Oh, just around," James replied sarcastically. Afterwards, he felt guilty for being so rude to his teacher. After all, he was just trying to help.

"Why haven't you been coming to class, Jim?" James took in a deep breath and looked down at the carpet as he thought about what he was going to say. "Do you know what the penalty is for skipping class?" James continued to stare at the carpet and did not move. "You know I have no choice but to write you up if I know you're skipping. I don't want to..." Mr. Matthews lowered his eyebrows and looked down, trying to see James face. "Jim, I'm not sure what happened, but..."

"I want to drop band!" James blurted out, finally looking up.

"Why?" Mr. Matthews asked, thoroughly confused. "You were doing so well."

James stood up and hesitated before saying, "My trumpet is at home, but I'll bring it in tomorrow to give it back to you." He turned to leave when Mr. Matthews stood up also.

"James," he said. James stopped right outside the office, his back towards his teacher. "Keep it for the rest of the year. You might just change your mind." James rolled his eyes and after making sure his "ex-teacher" had nothing more to say to him, began walking away.

"I doubt it," he mumbled under his breath. As he took his leave, he never expected to see Mr. Matthews again.

Virginia Abernathy

Even though he was allowed to drop a class James was still technically skipping because he did not bother to discuss this issue with the counselor. Mr. Matthews did not want to write him up, but still kept track of how many days James had missed. If James skipped six days of class, he would have to go to school on Saturday. Mr. Matthews hoped, however, that James would return before that time and a few detentions would suffice as punishment.

Four days had gone by and James had not returned to band. If he did not return by Monday, a day at school on Saturday would be his reward. Mr. Matthews was depressed, for he had had so much hope for James. There was something about James that made the teacher want to help. Now, for whatever reason, James was giving it up. It just didn't make sense.

Friday marked the last day of the first quarter. Every quarter, at least in junior high, one class changed. James was about to end his music class, which was mandatory. After what happened last Friday, he was relieved to be through with anything pertaining to music.

Seeing a concert was the final activity of his music class. So, that day they went on a field trip. They were walking over to the high school to see a jazz concert, which was the last genre of music they had studied. James was less than excited. He wanted nothing more to do with Mr. Matthews' profession. Now he was being forced to listen to two whole hours of it.

Great! James thought. *Now I get to see professional band geeks.* He laughed at this notion, but really did not think it was funny.

They left at around third period and would return right before sixth period began. This was supposed to be band for James, if he intended to go.

James took his seat in one of the last rows of the auditorium. He watched all the people hurrying around, like ants collecting food. It was a beautiful auditorium. The navy blue curtains shimmered in the lights and a wooden stage stretched far out to the sides.

The students, all except James of course, were not only excited because they were on a field trip, but they were also sitting in the high school. It was the jazz festival in-school performance and the Andrews-Davis Big Band would be performing, with a special guest. Most of the children had seen the jazz festival concerts after school

La Leyenda *The Legend*

before. It was the highlight of the year. James, however, had never been to one. The eighth graders who were fortunate enough to have music class first quarter always attended the in-school performance. However, at that point, James did not think it was much of a privilege.

Whispers were heard from all of the junior high students as the lights dimmed and a man who would introduce the players walked on the stage and into the spotlight.

At the start of the concert, James pretended that he did not really care. Even though his eyes grew a tad wider when the alto saxophonist played a million notes in a few seconds, he pretended not to be impressed and crossed his arms in defiance. However, when the trumpet player had a solo, it was hard for him to disguise his interest. In fact, after awhile he completely forgot that he *didn't* care.

Smiling and tapping his foot, he watched in awe at the trumpet player, while he played an octave higher than the last measure. Suddenly the shiny, metal tube had been transformed into a machine full of life and vigor. The solo ended when he ripped up to a screaming note, while the audience gasped and James's mouth fell. The man leaned back and pointed his instrument in the air, not at all embarrassed about being a professional band geek. Sounds of triumph and hard work came spewing out, but finally stopped when he forced the trumpet forward. He smiled at the roaring audience, while the rest of the band continued, as if nothing had happened. Bowing, he walked back to his place with the band. James watched that man for the rest of the concert.

Suddenly, James was filled with a desire to be able to do that. To stand upon a stage in front of thousands of people and just play; and play well. That was his dream. He had never wanted this dream until that moment, and he never stopped wanting it after that. That was what he finally realized he loved to do, and he was bound and determined to keep doing it; no matter what.

After the concert, the stage was immediately filled with teenagers who wanted autographs. It was a jazz festival tradition. No musician ever got away without signing something if they came to the high school.

Virginia Abernathy

When it was finally James's turn to talk to the trumpet player, he was speechless. Standing there in awe James handed the man a pen and a program. Smiling, the man gently took his pen.

"What's your name?" he asked in a deep voice.

"Uhhh...James." James was glad to see that actual words were coming out.

"Do you play an instrument?" the man asked, as he wrote. He had one leg on a riser and the program on his knee.

"Yeah. I play trumpet."

The man looked up and smiled, much to James's delight.

"That's great," he said, and began writing once more. "How long ya been playing?"

"I just started this year."

The man handed the program and pen back to James. "Well, keep practicing and maybe one day you'll be up here with the rest of us."

James smiled and, though he had so much he wanted to say, found himself speechless again. Right as another student came up to the trumpet player, James got out a quick, "Thank you."

"No problem," the man replied.

James walked slowly back to the high school, as if in a dream, while the other students ran around him wildly. As he walked, he suddenly realized that he had not even read what the man had written on his program. He opened it up slowly.

To James,

May the trumpet always bring you joy and may your dreams come true. If you follow your heart, you'll have nothing to lose. Keep practicing and making music.

Maynard Ferguson

When he arrived back at school, he raced to band. Before class started, he asked a surprised, but happy, Mr. Matthews if he could have an extra trumpet, since his was at home, and a copy of the music they were playing. Mr. Matthews never discovered just what had happened to change James' mind, but whatever it was, he was glad it did.

La Leyenda *The Legend*

Looking out to the east, James could not even see the sun rising yet. It was so early. Why did he decide to do this again?

Suddenly, Alex grabbed James's shoulder and he jumped in fright.

"Shhhh!" Alex said and then pointed to a small, feathered creature. "Look over there." James saw it, but could find nothing amazing about it.

"What is it?" he asked in a whisper.

"It's a bird," Alex said, facetiously, "don't you know why we're here?" They both laughed quietly. James still could not remember just how Alex had convinced him to go bird watching with him on one of his rare days off, which happened to be Saturday. It probably had something to do with the fact that Alex mentioned it would be "fun". Never having heard that word come out of his brother's mouth, James decided to go along with it.

"I know it's a bird!" James retorted with a smile. "What kind of bird?"

"It's a nuthatch."

"A what?"

"A nuthatch," Alex repeated, staring in awe at the tiny creature as it made its way down the trunk of a maple.

"What kind of a stupid name is that?" James asked, rather loudly.

"Shhhh!" Alex commanded, "you'll scare it off." After a moment of watching the bird, Alex said, "See how it goes down the tree head first?"

"I'm watching it just like you, aren't I?"

Alex glared at him with brotherly love, but continued despite his comment. "There's another bird called the brown creeper. It goes up the tree. I've heard that the reason they can live together is because they don't affect the others' niche."

"What?" James asked, having no clue as to what he was talking about.

"A niche. You know...like...well a great horned owl is at the top of the food chain, right?"

Virginia Abernathy

James nodded. "I guess so," he said, wondering what this had to do with nuthatches.

"Well, a passerine, like an eastern bluebird, would not be in the same niche because it's not as high up in the food chain, right?"

"If you say so," James replied, not even trying to understand anymore.

"Well, anyway...the point is, the nuthatches and creepers don't have to compete against each other for food."

"Why not? And what does that have to do with niches?"

"Okay, forget the niches. You see, the nuthatch is going down the tree, whereas the creeper is going up the tree. They're at different angles, therefore, they see different insects. You with me so far?"

"They eat insects?" James said, disgusted.

"Yes. And since they see different insects, they each get to eat the insects they see, without interfering with the others' food supply. At least that's what I've heard."

"Yeah, but, what about the insects?" James asked, sympathetically.

"Who cares about insects? This is birds we're talking about."

"Yeah, but the insects have feelings too." James smiled and they both laughed, until Alex saw another bird and made James be quiet.

"Is that a woodpecker?"

"Very observant," Alex said, in a deep voice. "It's a red-bellied woodpecker."

"Red-bellied!" James exclaimed, almost offended. "That bird does not have a red belly! It has a red head!"

"I know, but there's already a red-headed woodpecker."

"Well, they could have come up with a better name than red-bellied."

"Hey, do you hear that?" Alex asked, now more excited than when he saw the nuthatch.

"I hear lots of things," his brother replied, sarcastically.

"Listen. Do you hear a bird saying 'hear I am', 'how are you'?"

James laughed as Alex began talking with a high-pitched voice, amused that his brother was so excited.

"If you hear a bird saying that," James continued laughing, "then I'm going to have to commit you."

La Leyenda *The Legend*

"They're not *really* saying it," Alex sighed. "It just *sounds* like they are."

James listened and to his surprise could actually hear what Alex was talking about.

"Wow," he said, amazed that he had not heard it before, "that's cool. What bird is that?"

"A red-eyed vireo."

"Let me guess, its eyes are blue?"

Alex glared at his brother and continued listening to the bird with delight.

"Wow," James commented, "it likes to sing."

"Yeah," his brother replied. "It'll sing for hours. It loses body weight it sings so much."

"Geez! Why would it want to do that?"

"Well, it gains it back when it eats."

"Yeah, but still..."

"Well, the female picks the male that sings the longest. So, they sing in order to survive. To keep the species going."

"Yeah, but why do they have to sing so long? I mean, the robins in our backyard only sing for five seconds and then they're good for the day."

"Believe me, it's longer than five seconds," Alex replied. "But the vireo is a different species and that's just what they do."

"Yeah, but..."

"Think of it this way," the older brother interrupted, "the vireo who persevered and sang all day will have more joy when he is picked than the robin who sang for five seconds."

James furrowed his brow as he pondered this for a minute. "Hmmm...I guess I never thought of it that way." They both were silent for a while, as they continued listening to the sounds of nature.

"Hey, Alex?" James finally asked, sitting down on a nearby log. Alex stayed standing, watching a chickadee in the above branches.

"Yeah?"

"If you like birds so much, why didn't you go to college and become a bird...ologist."

"Ornithologist," Alex corrected.

"Yeah, whatever."

Virginia Abernathy

"Well, James, we didn't really have the money and I felt responsible for you. I knew Mom wasn't going to take care of you." He walked over and sat down next to James as he talked. "So, even though I was well in my rights to move out and study birds, I was afraid of what would happen to you. So, I stayed."

"But why?"

"I told you, I felt responsible for you. I don't know. That's just what big brothers do."

"Yeah, but, you could've gone off and become some famous science bird guy. You could've been a real success if you had continued." After a moment of watching a blue jay fly by in the trees above Alex turned towards his brother.

"If our father had actually been a father," he explained, "then he would've made it possible for both of us to go out and be great. But he wasn't. So, I took his place. I did it for you. I can't be a big success, James, that's your job."

They both smiled and Alex looked back up to the trees. James wanted so badly to give him a hug, but was afraid of what he might think. Little did he know, Alex was thinking the exact same thing.

"Don't worry about me," Alex said, still looking towards the trees, "I'll go back to college after you do. I just want to make sure you're taken care of."

As James watched his brother, who was watching another woodpecker, he thought it rather ironic that he loved birds so much. Alex was trapped by a responsibility he felt for his brother. But the birds that he loved, were free. James only hoped that one day, Alex too would be free like them.

It's good to have a brother, he thought. Suddenly, Alex broke the silence.

"Hey, James, look!" he whispered and pointed with delight.

"What?" James asked, his eyes searching for whatever Alex had found.

"See that bird in the tree over there. No, no, over there."

James finally saw what he was talking about.

"Yeah?" he said, wondering what interesting fact Alex was going to tell him about this species.

La Leyenda *The Legend*

"That's a wood thrush," he said, and the speckled bird replied with its melodious song. "It's my favorite." James looked at his brother and smiled.

James played and practiced for the rest of that year; despite his mother's incessant yelling and his classmates constant mockery, not to mention the solitude he felt in band when no one would talk to him. Nevertheless, he was not going to let all of that stop him. One day, he knew that he would be the trumpet player up on that stage. And he was determined to do anything to make it there.

Follow your heart and make your dreams come true.

La Leyenda

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/1823.html?s=pdf>