

Musicologist Mara Solomon must solve a murder for the police.

A NOTE BEFORE DYING

by ADAM COLE

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Mara Solomon, talking to her mother on the

phone, was in a hard place.

"Yeah, I know, Mom."

Mara turned her body clockwise, holding the phone by her fingers like a distasteful something. Edna Solomon continued to complain. Occasionally she would pause briefly to be sure her daughter was still listening.

When Mara was on the phone with her mother, she heard herself saying "I know" a lot. Edna talked, Mara would listen. Mara knew, Mara understood, Mara, "the big shot college professor," was expected to help, even while her mother was beating her about the ears.

"The place is a goddamn mess," Edna said from the phone. Her voice was sharp, bitter, old-lady deep.

"Yes, I know," Mara said.

"I can't keep it clean by myself," Edna said.

"I know, Mom, but..."

Suddenly Cybil, her downstairs neighbor, was standing in front of her. "Dr. Solomon?" she said, as if Mara wasn't on the phone.

Now Mara was between a rock and a hard place. Cybil had heard her talking. Cybil would never let her alone.

"I know, Mom," Mara said again, because she didn't know what else to say right at that moment.

"Dr. Solomon?" Cybil said again, as if Mara wasn't on the phone. She didn't seem to register the idea of phone, or busy. Or personal space.

"Okay, Cybil," said Mara, holding out her hand for silence. Her mother was still talking.

"And I need someone to come out and fix my dishwasher," Edna said. Mara, who would have loved to oblige her mother, if only to shut her up, tried to explain that she had a couple of things to do first.

"I can't find my car," Cybil said.

"I said I will when I can, Mom."

"I don't know where my car is," said Cybil.

"Will what?" Edna said. "I need someone to come *now*."

Mara's grey eyes lost their focus as she gave in momentarily to the overwhelming stimulus of these two unstoppable objects. "I will when I *can*, Mom," Mara repeated. "I just have to help my neighbor—"

Mara heard the phone click and knew her reply had been unacceptable.

She sighed heavily and dropped her phone onto the sofa next to the newspaper and the book about Richard Strauss and the red hand-knitted scarf that she had just picked up from Target yesterday. She would allow herself to be tired for one second. Then caregiver

instincts would seize her by the throat and she would move to the next problem.

Mara's neighbor, Cybil Berger, lived downstairs. Once she had found out that Mara was a musicologist, she had started to visit more often. Cybil loved jazz, and she thought that was enough to give them something to talk about.

Each time Mara came near Cybil's door, Cybil would open it and say, "Hello, Dr. Solomon. What are you going to teach today?"

Did Cybil understand that Mara was a classical music scholar who specialized in the Late Baroque? For a while Mara couldn't tell if Cybil didn't realize or didn't care. She had finally decided that this was her neighbor's way of beginning a conversation.

"I can help you with your work," Cybil would say every time. "I know a lot about jazz."

Mara would then have to make some excuse as to why Cybil couldn't come with her to the office to help. After the hundredth time she ran out of excuses and would simply answer "Sorry, Cybil, not today."

Cybil tended to recognize that the conversation was over at that point and would say, "Gotta go."

Mara could not deny that she had developed an attachment to Cybil, but she also tended to dread hearing the same greeting every day. For this reason, she would try to sneak by Cybil's door on her way out of the building. Whenever it worked she felt incredibly guilty.

Mara believed that Cybil was on the Autism Spectrum. Cybil was very intelligent. She held a job as a data analyst for the CDC and drove her own car to work. But Cybil didn't always deal well when things went unexpectedly. There were some situations that really got Cybil confused. Today her car had just been stolen, and she didn't know what to do about it.

Cybil was already dressed in her usual red plaid button-down oxford shirt, khaki pants and clean white tennis shoes. She took a look at Mara through her heavy square glasses and thick black curly hair and said, "What are you going to teach today, Dr. Solomon?"

"I'm not going to work today, Cybil." Mara replied. "It's Tuesday and I don't teach on Tuesdays this semester."

"Well, then, where are you going?"

"To the police station. And you're coming with me."

Cybil shifted a little to her right foot. "I can't find my car."

"Someone stole your car. We have to file a police report."

"I don't know how," replied Cybil, without blinking.

"I figured, Cybil," said Mara. "So I thought I'd take you over there and give you a hand."

Cybil stood in the doorway for a minute. Then she said, "Then I could help you with your work."

"Maybe," said Mara. "We have to take care of your car."

"That's fine," said Cybil, satisfied. She vanished into her apartment. A moment later she returned with her black coat.

It was April, and very warm.

Mara Solomon parked her battered coupe in the gritty lot behind the two-story brick building which was the City of Decatur Police Station. She paused for a moment to listen to a few bars of the finale of Beethoven's *Eroica Symphony* playing on the radio. Not that it was a particularly good performance, but even badly performed music could be compelling if it was the right piece.

"Do you know what that is, Cybil?" Mara asked her neighbor. "That's the *Eroica*. Beethoven wrote it for Napoleon, but he got so mad at what Napoleon did later that he scrawled his name off the front page."

"I like jazz," Cybil said flatly, not looking up, as if answering a question Mara hadn't asked.

Dr. Mara Solomon shrugged and turned the key, killing the music a few bars shy of its consummation.

"Wait!" exclaimed Cybil. "That wasn't the end."

"No, but..."

"Turn it back on!" Cybil said, her eyes opening wide. "*Turn it back on!!!*"

Mara restarted the car and the radio came back on just in time, as the last chord sounded. Mara watched Cybil sit through the silence at the end until the announcer spoke.

At that point Cybil opened her own door and got out.

Mara pulled her solid round body out of the little red coupe and slammed the door behind her, stepping into the humid afternoon. It was already warm, too warm for the generous strands of her long greyish brown hair to be hanging down. She reached up with her small hands and fastened it behind her head with a rubber band. As she did so, a long c-shaped scar, soft and brown, came into view along the left side of her face. Her lips, always pouty and round, were closed into a tight knot as she approached the police station with Cybil stamping along behind her.

She didn't know why she should be nervous. It wasn't *her* car that had been stolen. She was actually doing a nice thing, wasn't she? Missing work to help a friend?

To her surprise she heard harpsichord music coming from down the hall. As she followed the sound, she could see a boom-box sitting on a desk next to a chili dog and pickle. Behind them she made out a Detective in a small room with an open door.

"So what time did you notice your car had gone missing?" asked the station officer with whom she was

actually supposed to be talking. Mara wasn't looking at the officer now. She was looking at the Detective in the little room down the hall with the boombox who was busily writing something.

The station officer cleared her throat. "What?" Mara said, startled. "No, it wasn't *my* car. It was my neighbor's car." The delicate harpsichord music continued to waft, interfering with her ability to attend to the officer. What were they doing playing that in here? Did they always play this kind of music in the station?

"Your neighbor's car?" the officer repeated.

"Yes." Mara understood she had some explaining to do, but she was now fully caught up in the mystery of the music. She had thought it was Purcell, but as it continued, she began to lose confidence. Something about the music didn't *sound* right.

"Why are you filing a report on behalf of your neighbor?"

There was something strange about the sound of the recording. It was throwing her musical instincts off balance, making it difficult for her to accurately identify the composition. It distracted her so much she found it impossible to have a conversation with the impatient police officer. Ordinarily she'd be able to identify a Purcell piece in her sleep. Why was she having so much trouble now?

"Ma'am?"

Could it be the insistent questions of this musically insensitive police officer standing in front of her?

"No," she said, turning back again. "No, this is my neighbor." Mara gestured at Cybil, who had been standing silent beside her. "She's...She doesn't always report things. I thought she needed some help."

"I sometimes need help," repeated Cybil.

"Well, who's filing? You or your neighbor?" asked the officer.

"What?" Again the music held her, but not in a pleasant way. What was it? How could harpsichord music sound strange to her?

"Ma'am, *who is filing...*"

"Excuse me," Mara interrupted. "Could you tell me who that is?" She pointed her stubby finger towards the office with the mustached man who continued to write on some kind of paper next to his boombox and chili dog.

"What?" The officer turned. "That's Detective Randle. So you..."

"May I speak to him?"

"Ma'am, do you think I can't help you with your problem?" The officer glowered. Mara hardly noticed. Her eyes were on the boombox.

"It's not that. It's the music."

"I can ask him to turn it down..."

"No!" Mara rose quickly to her feet. Forgetting for the moment about Cybil, she moved down the hall past

the reporting officer in order to get closer to the stereo on Detective Randle's desk.

"Mitch," said the officer, coming out from behind her table. She seemed obligated to warn her colleague that a crazy woman was coming his way.

The mustached man, Mitch Randle, looked up at Mara through his doorway, one of his eyes irritated with the interruption, the other unfocused.

"Mitch, could you turn it down? This young lady..."

"No, don't turn it down," Mara said. She moved through the doorway to the chair on the other side of Detective Randle's desk, her round hips negotiating the little room's obstacles effortlessly, as if she were dancing to the music.

The Detective had been wary of her arrival. "Can I help you?"

"Yes, I'm sorry," said Mara. "But who is that composer?"

"What?" The Detective's expression turned as sour as the pickle sitting on the wax paper next to his chili dog.

"I'm having trouble identifying the composer of that piece of music you're playing."

Mitch Randle's eyes flitted towards the box. Then they returned to Mara's face. She wasn't registering his annoyance at all. Her eyes were far away, years away. Behind her, the first officer was making helpless gestures.

"I wouldn't know that. I'm not a musician. I'm sure we could find out for you at a later—"

"It's just that there's something not *right* about it."

"What?" Detective Randle's mustache twitched as though it had been tightened from behind. Something about the way Mara had said the word "*right*" had struck a chord with him, and now he was interested against his better judgment. "What do you mean?"

"I think it's Purcell," Mara Solomon explained, her eyes darting left and right as the music cascaded along. "but for some reason I'm having trouble telling exactly."

"Well—" Randle didn't know exactly how to respond, but Mara saved him with her next question.

"Why are you listening to it? It's obviously not for fun."

"Ma'am," The first officer with whom she had been speaking had pulled herself together. She was now approaching from behind to assert herself and recapture Mara. But Randle intervened with a wave of his hand. "Go help the other woman," he said to the officer.

"I sometimes need help," Cybil repeated from the desk.

"It's evidence," Randle said, looking into Mara's eyes. She was not looking back, her own gaze focused distantly on the music. "It's actually an alibi."

"An alibi?" Mara mumbled to herself, as though she had no idea what the word meant.

"Yes. It's a recording of a studio file that's been timed and dated. The time and date the file was saved are supposed to provide proof that the performer of this music was actually at the studio when the crime occurred."

"That's fascinating!" Mara said, her mouth opening a little. The nail of her index finger came to rest upon the outside of her teeth.

"Yes," replied Randle, who obviously didn't think so.

"And who is the performer?"

"Ordinarily I'd tell you, but..."

"I was just curious, because I think they're fooling you."

Randle's mustache again came to attention and his eyes narrowed. "What makes you say that?"

"This is a recording of a harpsichord."

Randle shrugged. He had known it was some kind of instrument. "Okay, yeah," he said.

"Hear how it's getting louder and softer?" Mara said, her arm rising and falling.

"Yes."

"Well, harpsichords don't do that."

"What? What do you mean?" Randle was getting very agitated.

"Harpsichords can only play at one dynamic level, or two at most. They aren't like pianos. If you push a piano key down fast, it makes a loud sound. Push it

gently and the sound is soft. But a harpsichord...it plays the same no matter how hard or how gently you press the key. That was why the piano was such a revolution. Because it could play loud or soft. In fact, the name *pianoforte*, which was the full—“

“Ma’am...” Randle said, raising his hand to stop her before he lost the train of her initial statement. “What was your name?”

“Mara Solomon,” she said.

“Ms. Solomon,” the Detective went on, “Are you telling me this isn’t a recording of a harpsichord?”

“It’s ‘Doctor,’” corrected Mara.

“My mistake,” said the Detective.

“Well, it *sounds* like a harpsichord. But it’s being played like a piano. Hear that? It’s crescendoing there, in that passage.”

The police Detective urged her on. “How is that possible?”

“Well, I don’t know,” she said. “Maybe a synthesizer could imitate a harpsichord, except the synthesizer manufacturer didn’t know enough about the instrument to suppress the dynamic range?”

The Detective’s eyes went over Mara’s shoulders to regard the officer who was working with Cybil down the hall. He said nothing for a moment, and then spoke. “Dr. Solomon, if you’d have a seat?” The Detective rose up and, with a grand gesture of his hand, pointed at an empty chair before his desk.

For a moment, the spell was broken and Mara realized what she was doing. "I'm sorry I interrupted you. I just came to---"

"No, no, ma'am," the Detective reassured her. "No, you're fine. I just want you to answer a couple more questions for me, if you don't mind. You're..." he chuckled. "You're not a suspect."

When Mara had seated herself before the chili dog and the pickle, still listening to the faux Purcell performance, the Detective spoke again. "All right, ma'am, I just want to keep this hypothetical, you understand? I'm not at liberty to disclose any actual facts about anything I'm investigating. You understand?" he said again.

Mara nodded. "Sure," she said.

"Okay," said the Detective, rubbing his chin. "Let's say someone wanted to record Percy..."

"Purcell. Henry Purcell, English comp---"

"Purcell. Okay. Let's say he was a big shot performer. Let's say he wanted to perform it for a major record deal." The Detective grabbed at his chili dog as if it were trying to get away. He took a bite and, through it, asked, "Why would he do it on a synthesizer? Wouldn't he use a real instrument?"

Mara was quiet at first, considering. Just as the Detective was wondering if she had gotten lost in the music, she looked at him and answered, "I suppose for

convenience? Maybe he wanted to record the piece at home."

The Detective's eyes went up. "Mmmmmmmmm..." he nodded, though whether he was considering her answer or the chili dog, Mara couldn't tell. "Thank you. Yeah, thank you, that's interesting!" He paused to observe the finger he had lain by his mustache. "Dr. Solomon, I don't suppose you'd be willing to give me your number in case we need your expert help some time?"

Mara blinked, somewhat taken aback. "Sure..." she said, quietly taking out a card from her purse and handing it to the chili-stained fingers of Detective Randle.

"Very good," the Detective said, his eyebrows rising. "Officer Grey will finish taking your statement."

Mara nodded. Still musing over the strange recording, she rose to her feet and walked away, leaving the Detective to gaze thoughtfully at her small, round back.

Randle called the next morning, at a decent

hour, as Mara was settling herself down at her desk. The references for her newest article on Handel's *Dettingen Te Deum* lay unchecked as she brought the phone to her ear.

"Dr. Solomon?"

"Yes?"

"This is Detective Randle of the Decatur Police."

"Oh...okay..." Mara found herself caught between the compelling image of Handel's score, singing at her from the page, and the somewhat imploring, somewhat awkward sound of the detective's voice.

"Uh, Dr. Solomon. I was wondering if you could come back down to the station sometime today."

"Today?" Mara gazed worriedly at her article.

"If possible."

Hanging up the phone, Mara looked up to see Soren entering her office with an armful of papers and a covered paper cup. Soren was her graduate assistant and was irritatingly punctual. He was also as single minded about music as she was, and perhaps twice as shy. He had been fetching her some coffee when the phone rang, and now he had returned. She never asked Soren for the gift of the steaming cup, but he offered it each morning.

Mara spoke to him. "Soren, I have to leave."

"Where are you going?" The young man with eyes like Bambi blinked sleepily at her as the steam billowed between his hands.

"It's a long story. Will you check the references for me on the Handel article?"

"No problem," he said quietly, still holding the coffee. Mara nodded, satisfied. She liked Soren because he had nothing better to do in his life except thoroughly check her references.

She barely remembered to say thank you as she eased out the door, leaving Soren to drink her coffee for her.

Driving the ten minutes from Embry Hill University to the police station, Dr. Mara Solomon contemplated her situation. Professors of musicology were not often wanted by the police. In fact, given the response to her latest periodical submissions, she was not often wanted by anyone.

Her mother wanted her. Not that that counted in particular. She had once been engaged to Tony. He had wanted her...or so he said.

Mara sighed. No memory of Tony seemed to announce itself when it came. Just like him, it strolled in the door unannounced.

Just like the way he used to hijack her energy and focus, claiming it for his own insatiable need for attention. The way he used to keep her from finishing a

paper, or apply for a grant, his ghost stole her thoughts away from the question at hand so that she was forced to think about him, only him. She didn't register where she was until her car pulled up to the police station.

"It's funny," Detective Randle was saying. "We were originally so uninterested in this bozo that we barely checked his story. I still haven't even seen his face. He's recording an album of some kind, and I had a rough copy in my player. That's what you heard yesterday. I wasn't even listening to it. But when you suggested he might not have recorded it at the studio, we went back to talk to the engineer. Well, it seems you were right. The engineer became very nervous and decided to spill. Seems he was covering for our harpsichord player."

Again, Mara nodded, still having no idea what this was about.

"You see, Dr. Solomon, our suspect apparently recorded this lovely Purcell piece in his home on a fancy keyboard, and then asked the engineer to transfer it to a file in the studio at the appropriate time."

Mara blinked. "Why would he do that?"

The Detective smiled. "Good question! Other than the obvious answer, that he wanted to be two places at once, we don't really know. And we're hoping you can shine some light on that."

A wave of suspicion suddenly swept over Mara, and she narrowed her eyes. "Wait. Am I being accused of

something here? I don't know this man! I'm just interested in Baroque music. Do I need a lawyer..."

"Calm down, Dr. Solomon!" the Detective said, extending his scar-covered hand to reassure her. "You're not under investigation! We have no interest in your whereabouts on the night in question."

"Then..." Mara said, leveling her gaze at the detective. "What am I doing here?"

Taking a breath, as if, against his own better judgment, he was about to suggest something utterly ludicrous, the Detective said, "It occurred to me that you might be useful to this investigation, seeing as how it involves musicians."

"In what way, *useful*?" she asked.

"We're investigating the death of the harpist Reanne Adastra."

Stupid bitch. The words came unbidden to Mara's head.

"Oh, crap."

"You were a fan?"

"She was...a friend," Mara said, shaking her head. *The last of them.*

"Oh, I'm sorry," said the Detective. "I had no idea. She seems to have been abducted from her apartment three nights ago, apparently while she was practicing. Someone reported her missing yesterday. This morning we recovered her body from the middle of the Swann Preserve, under a bridge by the South River."

Mara blinked once, gasping. It said a lot that Mara was only finding out from the police. The image of her friend came to her mind, the face ghastly, water-logged. Mara put her hand on the desk to keep from reeling.

Stupid bitch.

"What can I do?" she whispered.

"Well," the Detective said, pulling a file from a drawer full of carefully stacked papers and photographs. His fingers found something large. "I was wondering if this means anything to you."

He handed across a photocopied folio. It was a ditto of four pieces of manuscript paper, handwritten, upon which were the scrawls of a recent composition of some kind. Mara took the booklet in her hand and gazed down at it. Upon the top it read, "Swansong for Harp."

"This looks like it could be one of her transcriptions," Mara said after looking at it for a second. She gazed hard at the notes. "I've never been that good a sight-reader. A problem with my eyes. I could probably pick it out if you have a piano."

The Detective restrained a laugh. "No, ma'am, I'm sorry, it's...uh...being tuned." He smiled at her, but he was uncertain if she took his remark as the joke it was.

"May I borrow this?" she asked, holding the ditto up. "There's not much I can tell you until I play it."

The Detective shrugged. "You'll have to fill out some paperwork, but I think we can arrange it."

"No pun intended," Mara muttered, gazing across the notes on the paper.

Detective Randle missed the joke entirely.

Back in her office, Mara stared up at the photocopied manuscript paper, the handwritten scrawl of notes dotted across it like a strange constellation. It was hard for her to read music quickly...something had always been wrong with her vision. Words were better than music notation, and given enough time she could work out a piece well enough to play it competently. But the kind of all-over-the-place eye tracking of a good sight-reader was impossible for her. Carefully, painstakingly, she began to play the notes from the beginning.

The piece was very dissonant, like Schoenberg, very harsh and unmelodic. Was it a twelve-tone piece? Serial compositions were carefully constructed and took a long time to write, but the haste with which these notes seem to have been written out suggested a complete lack of forethought.

Lack of forethought wasn't one of Reanne's character traits. Was it a transcription of another composer? Dallapiccola? John Cage?

"What were you thinking about?" Mara asked the ghost of Reanne Adastra.

"What are you thinking about?" Reanne had asked Mara, sitting on her rug in her living room, watching a reality tv

show while Mara was hiding in the huge oversized comfy chair.

"That there are so many other things you could do with your time. This show is trashy!"

"It's something that I do for me," Reanne said, turning back towards the screen. "You going to LA for that conference?"

"No..." Mara sighed. "I was going to, but my mother broke her wrist."

Reanne turned around. "No way! Is she okay?"

"She says she's not," Mara answered. "You'd think she was in a body cast!"

"But you've been looking forward to this trip for a month. You were going to go to the ocean, see Venice Beach..."

"I know. I can go next year."

"Next year it won't be in Los Angeles," Reanne reminded her.

"Well, I can go to Los Angeles some other time," Mara reasoned.

"Like when?"

"Whenever I want!" Mara snapped.

Reanne laughed again. "Girl, you haven't gone anywhere in five years. Every time you —"

"Don't say it."

"—make a plan, something happens to your Mamma."

"Don't say that! It isn't true."

"And you decide you have to stay."

"Well, what would you do?" Mara demanded.

Reanne paused for a second, surprised. Then she shook her head slowly. "I don't want to die knowing I never took care of me."

There came a rhythmic knock on her office door. "Come in," she muttered. In walked Soren, another stack of papers in his hands.

"I've finished these," he said. He set them by her side on the bench. "You made two errors," he offered, like a cat laying a dead mole on his owner's doorstep. His eyes caught the surface of the page. "What are you playing?"

She wondered too late if she should have hidden the evidence from him. "Oh, nothing," she remarked, pulling the paper down. "Just a piece for the harp..." In her haste, the sheets fell to the ground below her piano bench. Quickly, Soren bent to pick up the papers before she could stop him.

Soren saw that the music was hand-written. "Did you compose this?" he asked, smiling a little.

"Uh...yes..." she lied, taking the sheets hastily away from him.

"I didn't know you wrote!"

"Oh, well, I don't tell people about it much."

"For harp, you said?"

"Yes, oh, yes, I've always loved the harp."

"It looks pretty dissonant," Soren commented. He wasn't looking at the piece now. He was looking at *her*, regarding her with a new fascination.

"Yes," she replied, nodding quickly. Mara tried to hide the deception in her voice. "I'm a pretty dissonant person."

"Well, you obviously can't play a couple of those passages," he said.

"What?" Mara scowled in irritation. "What do you mean?" Her piano playing wasn't *that* bad.

"I mean, on the harp," Soren said. "They're not playable on the harp."

"What?" Mara asked again. She looked quickly down at the notes. They all seemed the same to her.

"Yes, here, see?" Soren said, pointing his bony index finger at a cluster of notes. "And here," he said, moving his arm to the left and down where the music continued. His shoulder pressed up against her, and he straightened quickly, embarrassed. With a little start, he cleared his throat and moved a couple of steps across the room.

"Ahhhh!" Mara said, smiling. She saw it now. "Good job, Soren! Tell me why."

"Those are clusters," Soren said, looking down. "Four notes right next to one another, played at the same time...you can't *do* that on a harp."

Mara gazed at the oddity Soren had beaten her to. The cluster looked like a small bunch of grapes, the four circles shoved together, connected by a single stem.

Soren continued, pointing at the cluster with a bony, informed fingertip. "The way the harp works, with its pedals, there are some combinations of notes you can't

play at the same time. Like what you've got there, A, B-flat, B, and C."

"Huh," said Mara. "Silly me."

Soren went on. "I lost ten points on an orchestration exam for not knowing that."

Mara was so absorbed in the score that she did not reply.

Soren blushed and backed into the wall. "I've got to go," he said quickly. "Call me when..." The remainder of his sentence was lost in the hallway.

Mara looked at the paper with newfound interest. She circled the cluster of notes several times, in several places in the manuscript. Adastrá's use of the cluster was no accident.

Why, Mara wondered, would an expert harpist, writing out a piece for a single harp, include several examples of a cluster she knew could not be played on it? Was it for the harp?

Mara's gaze dotted up to the top of the first page. The title winked at her. "Swansong for Harp." She heard the words of the Orlando Gibbons madrigal in her head.

*The silver Swan,
who living had no Note,
When Death approached,
unlocked her silent throat.
Leaning her breast against the reedy shore,*

*Thus sang her first and last,
and sang no more:
"Farewell, all joys!
O Death, come close mine eyes!
"More Geese than Swans now live,
more Fools than Wise."*

The words of the song referred to the ancient legend of the Mute Swan who, at the moment of her death, was said to burst into a heartbreaking song. Mara imagined the harpist scribbling madly as the door to the apartment opened to reveal her murderer.

Did Reanne *know* she was going to die? Did she know far enough in advance that she had time to scribble out this composition?

Why compose a piece? Why not call for help?

Why would even a seasoned composer, which Reanne was not, write something like this, unplayable, unlistenable?

“I don’t want to die knowing I never took care of

me.”

That’s what Reanne had said. Mara hadn’t answered, hadn’t really thought about it at the time. She had been angry about Reanne’s comment that she always put her mother first. Well, what am I supposed to do, she always wanted to protest? Let her suffer? The woman was a basket case.

Mara’s mother had never been a fully functional person. Edna had suffered from a severe fever as a girl and had never been the same afterwards. Always a little loopy, she had managed to hold it together long enough to snare an inattentive man. By the time he’d realized that her dizziness was not a coquettish flirt, it was too late. They had birthed a daughter.

Mara’s father had barely managed to take care of them in the years he’d been around. At the point of exhaustion he decided twelve-year-old Mara was ready to take over for him, and he vanished to the West Coast, never to be seen or heard from again. After that Edna Solomon had no one but her daughter.

Edna had been okay until then. Okay in a relative way. Before her husband had left, she used to do the

Mom thing, bought Mara clothes, even though sometimes they were the wrong size or boys' clothes, made lunch for Mara before school, though she forgot as often as she made it. And the lunches were substandard, sometimes a bad peanut-butter and jelly shoved into an unwashed lunchbox. But she had *tried*.

After the departure of her husband she turned mean. Sour. Disinterested.

Mara, who had always been observant as a kid, could tell that something was wrong with her mother, with the way they were living, even when her father was around. On the odd occasions where she might be invited over to someone's house, she noticed things were much more stable over there. That didn't bother her until she was older.

Little kids in the days before the internet didn't really know what mental illness was unless somebody told them. And Mara didn't have those particular resources at hand. All she had were some books on music her father owned, and as her friends gradually began abandoning her, she had lots of time by herself to work through them.

She figured out that what happened to her Mom was maybe something like what happened to Robert Schumann, or Hugo Wolf, a gradual disintegration of the faculties. Bursts of creativity and clarity, followed by long periods, even months, of languor, depression, disorganization.

Still thinking about her mother and Reanne, Mara drummed her fingers on the small table in the Brownstone Pub in downtown Decatur as gymnastic waiters danced around her like Chinese plate spinners, brandishing full platters on their hands. Meanwhile, the scene outside the clear glass window of the restaurant was typical for downtown on a Thursday afternoon in April: Muggy, hot. Kids sitting around in the drizzling rain with their hoodies on, talking to one another, skateboarding around on the newly constructed plaza that covered the Marta station. The sounds of their boards rose and fell like a chorus of hoarse voices.

A little bell sounded, the curtain call to a scene she was in. Detective Randle shouldered his way through the narrow doorway, looking at the crowd in the restaurant over his hairbrush-bristle mustache. Spying her, he almost smiled but caught himself, maintained his professionalism, and moved in towards her little table.

"Hello," he said, and sat down deliberately, shoving his raincoat out behind him like the tails of a tuxedo.

"Hi, thanks for coming," Mara said, trying to be heard over the noise without actually yelling.

"My pleasure," he said. Randle had no trouble making his voice audible. Deep and booming, it cut haphazardly through the noise.

"What do you have for me?" he asked.

"Well...it's interesting," she said, making a gesture with her hand which didn't mean much.

"Interesting to your line of work, or mine?" the Detective asked.

"Not to mine, exactly." Mara took Reanne's composition out of her purse. "It's not a great piece of music."

"Okay," said the Detective gamely, smiling a little beneath his mustache.

"No, it's just...there are a lot of things about it which make me wonder..."

"Make you wonder what?"

"If it's a death-note of some kind."

The Detective's eyes instantly lit up. Now she was speaking his language. He seemed to be restraining himself, as if she was a horse and he might spook her.

Mara continued. "Look at the title: *Swansong*. That could have been the harpist's way of letting us know she knew that she was going to die."

"Why is that?" The Detective's eyes narrowed.

"Because according to folk legend, the Swansong is the last thing a swan sings before it dies," she said.

"Okay," said Randle. He was silent, expectant, offering no clue to his thoughts. His eyes remained steely, still apparently interested, but his mouth and bushy mustache was hidden behind his finger as he listened.

"There's more," Mara continued. "Look, you see this?" She pointed at the little bunches of notes.

"Yes..." Randle focused his eyes on the page uncertain of what he was looking at. It was just a collection of little black circles to him.

"These are clusters. They're groups of notes that are close together. They can't be played on a harp."

The waiter asked Randle if he wanted to see a menu. Randle waved him off carelessly. He brought his attention back to Mara, but the incident had broken her momentum.

Seeing the glazed look forming in Randle's eyes, Mara tried to recapture his interest. She leaned forward. "Why would a harpist as good as Adastra write something that you can't play on the instrument?"

Randle considered for a moment. "I don't know," he shrugged. "Maybe it's a mistake?"

Mara blinked. Okay, yes, that was a possibility. "Well, she did it several times," Mara said, flipping with just a little annoyance through the pages.

"Maybe she made the mistake several times?" the Detective offered. He was humoring her now, still patient, but it was clear she was losing ground.

"That's why I don't think it was a mistake," she argued. "I think it's---"

"It looks like she wrote this thing out kind of fast," the Detective said, bringing his hand to the paper and flipping the pages under her nose as if Mara wasn't there. He was listening more to himself than to her, now. "She

probably didn't notice. She might have planned to correct it later, or to give it to another instrument."

That was a damn good guess. The sense of it annoyed Mara immensely, because she thought it was *wrong*, but she couldn't say why. She glowered at the pages.

"Did you find anything else?" Randle inquired. He was obviously trying to hide his disappointment behind a good-natured smile.

"No..." Mara said, looking hard at the music, as if hoping something new would appear. "I thought it was...last night it seemed..."

The Detective tapped her hand genially a couple of times. The scars on his palm were harsh against the tender skin of her knuckles. "I know just how it is," he said. "Sometimes I'll get brilliant insights in the middle of the night and the next morning they'll be like, 'The criminal ate more cereal.' Something like that. Don't worry about it."

Stretching, Randle got up. He gave Mara a mild look. "Dr. Solomon, I really appreciate the time you spent," he began.

"Sure, you bet," Mara said, looking up at him as if he had been the only guest at her party.

"No, really," said the Detective. "Why don't you hold on to the paper, and if you see anything else that you think is strange, give my assistant a call and tell him about it. Okay?"

His assistant. So that was it. Her credibility with the detective was officially over. "All right," she replied.

"Atta girl," he said. "Thanks for calling. I'll see you around." He rose to his feet and, with a preoccupied glance, surveyed the restaurant. With hardly a look back at her, Detective Randle vanished into the crowd.

Atta girl? Mara sat amidst the ruins of her theory, disgusted, while the waiter obviously brought her the plate of brie and crackers she had ordered. She matched a cracker and a piece of cheese, placed them together and furiously began to nibble.

All of a sudden there was a terrible clatter of dishes and silver. Mara saw an upstretched hand follow its owner down to the floor. She quickly rose in alarm.

It had happened to the man sitting at the next table. She flew to his side, her instincts for helping on high alert.

"You okay?"

"Sorry," said a voice from the floor.

"Sorry? What? You fell."

"I know," agreed the man. "I know, but it's all right."

"Are you hurt?" The waitress had come over too, and had sympathetically begun cleaning up the mess. She looked down at Mara and smiled, seeing that the man was taken care of.

"Could you get my stick?" the man asked her. His eyes were blue and watery.

"Sure." Mara hastened to help. She found the cane under a nearby chair and, with apologies to the woman sitting there, she retrieved it.

"Are you okay?"

"I may have bruised my hip... I'm used to that. It's just embarrassing."

"No, nobody cares," said Mara. "I mean...everybody *understands*. Just...look, why don't you come over to my table."

"That's ridiculous," said the man. "You've been very kind. I'm---"

"No, your table's a mess. It's going to take them a while to clean that up."

He had regained his feet. She held him steady.

"Well..." he looked around in consternation. "Well...all right. You're sure you don't mind?"

"No. No, come on." She led him towards her table. He found the seat that Randle had just vacated and eased himself into it, sighing.

"Well, you're very kind," he said again. He was very well dressed, though some of the shine of his suit had been lost from the water spilled on it.

"Here, you need a napkin to get that water," Mara said, still fussing over him.

"I hope you'll at least let me pay for whatever you're having," the man said.

"No, that's ridiculous. It's just crackers."

"Well, even so..."

His expression changed. He looked eager, interested, but a little embarrassed. "I'm sorry, this isn't any of my business. But did I hear you talking about music?"

"Yes..." Mara said. "Why?"

He held out his hand. "I'm Arthur Page. My friends call me Artie."

She took his hand. The skin was soft, but Mara guessed that the hand had been worked on. His nails were manicured.

"Nice to meet you. I'm Mara Solomon," she replied.

"Ah! That explains it! You're a professor from Embry Hill University!"

She stared at him. "How would you know that?"

"I'm a musicologist too! I'm a visiting lecturer at Fulton State. I read your paper on Taverner's *Missa Gloria Tibi Trinitas* a couple of months ago."

"No kidding!" Mara peered at him.

"I thought it was pretty wonderful."

The corner of Mara's mouth went up. She hadn't even expected anyone to read the paper, much less enjoy it. "What a sweetheart."

Artie looked confused. "Was that a *police officer* you were talking to?"

"Yes," Mara said.

The man's brows furrowed in a puzzled expression. "About music..."

"Well, about Reanne Adastra. She's the harpist for the symphony orchestra here"

"Oh, I see."

"Yes. She was abducted last week."

"What?" he whispered.

Mara nodded. "Gone."

"What do you mean gone?...oh my God. *Dead?*" At the moment he said the word, his leg gave him a sudden pain and he winced.

"You okay?" Mara asked, alarmed.

"Yes." His eye twitched with discomfort. He brought it to focus on her. "Why would anyone kill a harpist?"

"They don't have a suspect yet, or even a motive."

"That's crazy! Was she a friend of yours?"

"Yes. I don't know. They aren't telling me much. But they found this music in her apartment. It's an original composition she wrote right before she was taken."

"That's interesting!"

"Yes. Unfortunately, it isn't telling us much."

Artie's mouth straightened into a determined line. His eyebrows went up. Hesitating a little, he asked "May I take a look?"

"Sure..." Mara turned it around.

Artie studied it while she studied him. Blond, thin hair, balding near the back. Fastidious in his appearance, but with soft, gentle facial features that could have been molded out of fresh bread dough. He looked almost

amused as he scrutinized the page he was holding. "I can see what you mean about it not being a great piece," he muttered. "And there are those clusters..." Artie's index finger came down on the little grape bunch. "Did I overhear you say you can't play those on a harp?"

"That's right. The instrument isn't capable of it. You could retune it, I guess..."

"No..." Artie mumbled. "No, that's not it. I doubt she was thinking about that. A natural, B-flat, B-natural, C-natural. Why do those notes seem so familiar?"

"And they appear several times."

"Yes..." muttered Artie. "I can see that. Oh, for crying out loud!" He sat up, looking very awkward. "I've just realized the time. I was supposed to meet someone at...Lenox? In about twenty minutes."

"Well, if you leave now, you should make it on time." Mara was lying. No one traveling by car in Atlanta was ever on time anymore.

"I'm really sorry..." he went on.

"Oh, no! It's all right..."

Artie reached into his pocket. "Can I give you my card? We could talk some more about this. You could give me a call..." He held out the card.

"Of course!" exclaimed Mara, reaching into her purse to fish out her University business card.

"Maybe we can have a real lunch," Artie suggested.

"Sure!" Mara replied.

"I wonder if you can do me a favor," he said, his smile fading. "I'm having a lot of trouble with the door..."

"Oh, you want me to get that for you?"

"If you don't mind..."

Mara got up and went over to the restaurant's glass door. Holding it open, she watched as Artie limped out.

Mara watched him move down the sidewalk. Then she went back and ate her cheese and crackers.

Idly, she took out her phone and did a search on Arthur Page. There he was, Fulton State University website. Fulbright Scholar, studied at Oxford, Yale...on the editorial board of several periodicals.

Nice. She hated the sound of her own thoughts going in that direction. "Nice. A *nice* boy."

Should she call him? Just about the music, of course. She wouldn't expect anything else. Considering it a date was out of the question. She'd never had much luck with making friends, much less dating. Music, even dissonant music, had always been a lot more dependable.

Mara sat across from Dr. Bottomdorfer,

Chair of the Music Department at Embry Hill University, in his high-ceilinged office. His desk was large, walnut, and clear of any impediments whatsoever. It was a vast, empty landscape like a desert or the surface of the moon.

Dr. Charles Bottomdorfer's hands were currently on the desk, clasped together. He sat on the edge of his seat in his loose-fitting suit, fingers intertwined, with his eyes looking askance at the heavens he was praying to.

"Doyle was an idiot, of course," he was telling her. Doyle was Bottomdorfer's favorite subject, his archrival, the only musicologist bright enough to cause him genuine misery. Bottomdorfer went on and on about Doyle. And on and on. He had been singing the litany of Doyle's sins to himself before Mara arrived at the University, and he would be doing so until she left.

Mara periodically visited Dr. Bottomdorfer, ostensibly to chew the fat but really just to keep up some kind of relationship with him. Bottomdorfer liked to gossip, and he loved to complain. Mara liked neither, but Bottomdorfer was the department chair and she needed him to be her friend. In fact, today she needed him to

help her, and if he would just shut up for a minute and listen she could ask him for that help.

He sat there at his desk with his eyes askew and his mind on some sleight that Doyle had no doubt inflicted upon him. There were others he despised, too. Baldwin, Mercer. But when he was really mad, he'd turn to Doyle.

"The man never actually graduated from Harvard, you know," Bottomdorfer said.

Mara would have liked to answer, just to illustrate to her colleague that she was in the room. But Bottomdorfer didn't give her a chance. He didn't care that she was in the room. He spoke after too short a pause. Maybe he imagined that he heard her answering him.

"He failed some senior class of some sort, something easy like Literature 101, and he wasn't allowed to walk. But he somehow talked himself into the Master's Program and got his degree retroactively. I suppose Bramwell must have been shooting people for him. I don't know. You'd never be able to prove it, of course, not now, it's all been fixed on paper...you'd have to go back to the archives if you really wanted to prove something like that."

Again, Bottomdorfer waited a requisite one-and-a-half seconds for Mara not to say something, then went on. "Someday I might do that...just for fun!" He looked at Mara then, and curved his mouth into a saccharine smile. Mara smiled back congenially.

"But no..." Bottomdorfer groaned. "No, they'd call it vigilante-ism, they'd say I was after him. Even though *he* managed to ruin *my* chances to work at Harvard and nobody said anything about *that*."

"Yes," Mara said, trying to get an important point across. "It's terrible when someone has the power to help you and they don't."

The hint was wasted on Bottomdorfer. What he had actually heard Mara say would remain a mystery, for he continued to speak from the monologue in his head.

"Just the other day I saw that he'd published a treatise on Cherubini. The man doesn't know anything about Cherubini. He's an expert on Liszt! If you can call him an expert...which I don't..."

"Charles," Mara began.

"And you know who published it? *The International Review of Musicology*. Of course. They've published everything he's ever written when it wasn't..."

Mara was subjecting herself to this punishment because without Dr. Bottomdorfer she would be unable to pursue her next project. He was one part of a long chain that kept her ambitions in check. The authorization of funds for her research were currently tied up in a bundle in a drawer in his walnut desk. She was here to ask him to pull it out.

"Charles, can I ask you something?"

"Hmmm, what?" Dr. Bottomdorfer seemed surprised to discover that there was someone sitting across the desk from him.

At that moment, Mara's phone sounded Liszt's *Liebestraum*. This particular ringtone produced two very unfortunate effects. It prevented Mara from making her request, and it irritated Dr. Bottomdorfer, because the ringtone was a piece by Liszt, which only just rocketed Dr. Bottomdorfer back to his tirade against Doyle.

"Expert on Liszt my foot. My *ass*," Bottomdorfer said, more emphatically, raising himself up with the aid of his hands and leaning emphatically across the desk, his eyes flashing.

Waving apologetically, Mara opened her phone. The ringtone had already told her who it was: Edna Solomon, her mother. She hardly had a chance to say hello.

"My sink's broken." A cold, insistent voice, heavy from years of doing nothing but complaining.

"Your sink?" Mara repeated.

"I can't do my dishes. I can't do a goddamn thing. I can't eat my lunch. I haven't eaten since three AM."

"Three AM..." Mara echoed dully. She didn't want to know.

"I couldn't sleep." Her mother snorted into the phone. "I woke up, I had something to eat. I think I must have dropped something down the drain."

Edna would never ask Mara to come over and fix it. The demand was always implied. The only question was how fast Mara could get there.

"I can be there in an hour," Mara suggested.

Insulted by the offer, her mother hung up the phone.

Dr. Bottomdorfer was glaring imperiously at her.

"I have to go," Mara said, putting her phone in her lap. "My mother."

Dr. Bottomdorfer wasn't interested in hearing about Mara's mother. He was only interested in complaining. Mara didn't want to ask him for her favor now. She knew it would only launch him into a tirade about how terrible it was that he was Chairman this year and that he didn't have time to handle everyone's financial affairs. By the time he got around to listening to exactly what it was she needed done, it could be an hour or more, and she'd already promised her mother she'd come right away.

"I'll see you later," she said to him.

"Bye!" he cried sardonically, wiggling his fingers with an exaggerated enthusiasm. As she shut his door, he turned away, disgusted, to stare out his window, no doubt to lick his never-healing wounds in solitude.

Edna Solomon still lived in the same ratty Norcross apartment where they had moved since Mara's father left. It was surrounded by other ratty apartments, and many of the other occupants were just as twisted and

bitter as Mara's Mom. A couple were nice, in the same way that a rotten apple is soft and sweet.

Edna fit right in there. A non-observant Jew and former dental hygienist, she'd had to give up her job when her eyes and her hands went bad. The office where she'd worked had offered a makeshift retirement plan which she'd paid into regularly, and now she took just enough from it not to starve.

Mara had been about 15 when Edna had been forced to quit. The remaining three years had been a kind of hell as her mother, already quirky, began descending into what could have been described as dementia, if she had been able to get it diagnosed. Mara's memories of the years before she escaped to college were hazy and well-suppressed. She had used music, and especially the books about music left behind by her father, as a constant refuge, and that was what she mostly remembered.

It wasn't easy for Mara to get to the apartment complex from campus. She had to drive down Briarcliff and deal with the stop-and-go traffic for more than half an hour before she could even get to I-85. This wasn't going to change. Despite the fact that her mother spent all her time in a broken-down box that used to be their home and always needed Mara for something, she would never acknowledge these things as reasons for her unhappiness. Mara was sure Edna would never leave the place until she was too weak to stop someone from dragging her out.

Today the sink was broken. Probably the drain. Mara wasn't a plumber, but years of tending to her mother's needs had made her handier than the average college professor.

As she pulled into the driveway, her phone went off again. Certain it was her mother, Mara snatched at it with impatience.

"I'm coming!" she snapped, before she looked at the display.

"What?" said a man's shocked voice.

"Ehh...oh my God. I'm sorry...who is this? I mean, hello?"

"I'm sorry...Dr. Solomon, did I call at a bad time? This is Artie."

"Dr. Page!" Mara exclaimed. "I'm so sorry!"

"It's Artie. No, no. Look, I can call you another—"

"How are you?" Mara said, to forestall him.

"Well, fine, thanks!" replied Artie. "How are *you*?"

"Fine! You just caught me in the car."

"Oh, I see! Traffic terrible?"

"Something like that. What can I do for you, Dr. Page?"

"It's *Artie*, and you can have coffee with me."

Mara chuckled. "I guess I owe it to you now."

"Not at all. In fact, I had a thought about your harp problem."

Mara had to think for a second to remember what he meant. "Oh! The manuscript."

"Yes. I've had an idea, but I want to share it with you in person. Is that all right?"

She experienced a moment's annoyance that he'd found something. She hadn't been able to think about it much since last week. But he had piqued her curiosity.

So they agreed to meet at a new café not too far from Mara's office. Hanging up the phone, Mara felt the return of the feelings which the piece evoked for her, the loss of her friend, this thorny mystery, which for the time being had erased all memory of her discontent with her mother.

She and Reanne had known each other since college. An outsider, Mara had considered herself beyond the help of friends. She loved her coursework, so she concentrated on that and didn't worry about being alone all the time. She was used to that.

Then one day after an evening class, when everyone else had gone and it was clear she had no plans at all, a harp major named Reanne came up to her and asked if she wanted to watch a videotape in her dorm room. As they talked that evening, they found they had some things in common, absent parents being one of them.

They'd been friends ever since. And not just friends, but guardians of each other, back to back, fending off the world. Reanne expected a kind of faithfulness, and Mara was willing to cooperate. She knew that when she was with Reanne, she was being taken care of for a change.

Mara had been thrilled when Reanne had auditioned for the harpist job in Atlanta. Reanne had gotten the tip about the position from a colleague of hers in England who had heard it from the conductor of the Atlanta Philharmonic himself. She was on it like a hound on a scent, and she secured it with the kind of determination reserved for those that can't afford to lose. Mara smiled at the memory of her friend's strength of purpose.

Those happy memories vanished when she breasted the doorway to her mom's place. It was always hard to sustain any kind of thought process entering the rancid smell of the apartment. No matter how many times she came over there, the place always looked neglected. Clothes were draped haphazardly across the faded furniture, and the windows were dingy on the outside. Mara had brought in a housecleaner named Carla to come once a week, as much to give her mother someone to talk to as to keep the place from complete collapse. But the apartment was old and there was mold in the walls, Carla had said, and other things she couldn't help with.

"Hi," Mara shouted as she let herself in with a key.

Edna was sitting at the window, absorbed in the poor view of the weedy parking lot. She didn't reply.

This was a familiar scene. Edna would call with some serious issue and imply that Mara needed to come over. Then, when Mara arrived, she would sit silent at the window as if not even registering her presence.

Mara removed her bag from her shoulder and opened it. Inside was a large oversized T-shirt. Without another word to her mother, Mara went into the bathroom to change.

She came out wearing the shirt and approached the sink. She asked her mother "Did you eat anything?"

Edna didn't reply. This too was typical of her. She spoke whenever she wanted, not when Mara spoke to her.

"Bottomdorfer was going on and on about Doyle," Mara said. "You actually saved me having to listen to any more of it."

Edna looked through the window.

It was actually sort of a relief for Mara to get under the sink where she could neither see nor speak to her mother. Upon releasing the trap and excising the water, Mara discovered a toothbrush wedged in, backed up by a large quantity of black sludge. Mara knew her mom's dishwasher wasn't working very well, and rather than purchase a new one, Edna had been doing a lot more over the sink. How the toothbrush got in there, Mara couldn't guess, and she knew she'd never get the answer from her mom.

By the time she emerged from beneath the sink to make a plea for a new dishwasher, her mother was wandering around, intent on some errand known only to her. She appeared to be straightening, but all she was really doing was moving furniture from one place to

another. "I can't find anything once that bitch Carla lays her hands on it," Edna finally muttered.

"Have you had *lunch*?" Mara asked.

Edna didn't answer. Exhaling, Mara returned to the bathroom to clean herself up. Returning again, she began rummaging through the kitchen to see what she could fix for them. She threw out several containers of gamey Chinese food and a Tupperware box full of spaghetti probably prepared by the housekeeper a week ago. She fixed grilled cheese sandwiches in the toaster.

Edna somehow managed to find the table. Mara and Edna sat facing one another over plastic plates, eating half toasted sandwiches and stale potato chips. Edna kept her eyes averted off to the left and didn't say a word.

As always, Mara made a couple of other attempts at communication. "I had to file a report for Cybil," she said. "You know, my strange neighbor?" Still no response. Just chewing. "Oh, this is funny!" Mara exclaimed. "The police actually asked me to help in an investigation." The comment elicited a brief flash of Edna's eyes, but the momentary twitch was quickly swallowed up by more chewing. "They needed a musicologist to help them solve the crime. Isn't that funny?"

If Edna thought it was funny, she didn't say so. Meantime, Mara had begun talking more to herself than to her mother. "Anyway, I don't know that I've been so

helpful. I don't think the Detective liked my ideas. I should probably stick to music." Mara gave a little chuckle.

Edna wasn't listening at all anymore. She had finished her sandwich and was contemplating the window again.

"You don't feel like talking?"

Edna shrugged. "Talk about what?" she asked. "Your boring stories?"

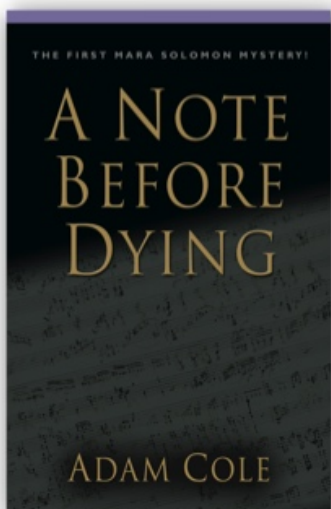
Mara felt heavy. "Okay," she said. "I have to get going."

Edna rose from her place first, leaving the empty sandwich plate behind, and went back over to the window.

Mara took her mother's plate to the garbage. She gathered her things.

"Bye, Mom," she said. And she waited.

Then, after a while, Mara pulled the door closed and left.



Musicologist Mara Solomon must solve a murder for the police.

A NOTE BEFORE DYING

by ADAM COLE

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