

Making MUSIC

The story of a girl, a paper piano,
and a song that sends her soaring to the moon

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY GRACE LIN



Plot Structure In most stories, there is a moment of great importance and excitement, when the main character's fate is decided. This part of the plot is known as the *climax*. Look out for it as you read.



“**M**om!” I called, rushing into the kitchen, “Mom! Can I learn how to play the piano?”

“The piano, Sabrina?” Mom said without looking up from the vegetables she was cutting. “Is this the new craze?”

“It’s not a craze,” I said. “My music teacher at school, Mrs. Donovan, got a jazz band to play for us today! And the piano player was so great—I want to learn how to play just like her!”

Mom stopped chopping vegetables and looked at me. “When you watched the Olympics, you wanted to learn how to ice skate. When Annie’s parents brought you to the ballet, you had to take ballet lessons. After visiting the museum, we signed you up for painting lessons. Everything became too hard or too boring, and after one or two classes you gave up. You’re always giving up, Sabrina.”

I felt myself **cringing**. I had been afraid she was going to bring up the painting class.

“I won’t give up this time,” I insisted. “This is different! Really!”

“How?” Mom asked, raising her eyebrows.

I thought a moment. How *was* it different? I remembered those cool notes of warm music that came from the piano, calling me like ocean waves on a hot summer day. All the sounds had rolled and tossed around me like a grand party I wanted to be a part of.

“Playing piano is making music,” I said finally. “And that’s what I want to do.”

Mom sighed. “Let me think about it.”

She did think about it. And she talked about it too. She talked to Dad and then to my Aunt Lily and then to my Aunt Lily’s friend Mr. Wong. It took a long time before she finally talked to me.

“OK,” Mom said to me, “you can learn how to play piano.”

Before I could hop with excitement, Mom stopped me. “But,” she continued, “we are not buying a piano.”

I looked at her, confused. How could I learn how to play the piano without one?

“We’re not going to spend all that money on a piano only to have you quit a couple of weeks later,” she told me, “so we made an arrangement with Mr. Wong. He’ll teach you once a week, and you can practice at his studio every day after he is done teaching.”

“When I make music,” I said, “will you buy a piano?”

“If you don’t give up,” Mom said, “then we *might* buy you a piano.”

So that week, I began piano lessons. Mr. Wong’s piano was beautiful, black and shiny like his hair, and I loved the smooth, cool keys. For the first few months, learning to play piano wasn’t that hard. There were a lot of dull things, like scales and exercises, but I practiced them like taking medicine. After I learned how to read music, and the notes of my scales and exercises stopped sounding like halting and tripping door chimes, Mr. Wong took out a song for me to play.

At first I was excited. Finally, I thought, I am going to make some music! But when Mr. Wong played it for me, my heart sank. This wasn’t music. Well, it was music, but it was boring. The song was slow and heavy, like a turtle marching, and each note fell like a gray stone.

“What’s wrong?” Mr. Wong asked me, seeing my disappointed face.

“Can’t I play a different song?” I asked.

He smiled at me. “This one first,” Mr. Wong said, “then we can move on.”

I played the rest of the lesson like a robot and went home.

At home, I leafed through the rest of the song book, black notes dotting the pages like little black bugs. Gavotte in G, Minuet, “Hunter’s Chorus” . . . I groaned. I could tell just by the names that they were all the same **dreary**, dull songs. If I wasn’t going to learn how to make music, what was the point? But if I told Mom I wanted to stop taking lessons, she’d say, “I told you so.”

The next day after school, I passed Mrs. Donovan in the music room. She was at the piano playing a song that rolled and danced. The notes seemed to hold me, and I stood tapping my foot.

“Hello, Sabrina,” Mrs. Donovan said, stopping her music. “Can I help you?”

“Your music,” I said, “What song is that?”

“It’s ‘Fly Me to the Moon.’ It’s famous,” Mrs. Donovan said. “It’s been in movies, commercials. Every jazz musician has done a version of it—Nat King Cole, Frank Sinatra, and lots of others. You’re taking piano lessons, right? Come on over here and try it. I think the world is ready for a Sabrina Liu version too!”

I sat next to Mrs. Donovan and tapped out the notes. It wasn’t easy, and my playing didn’t sound like Mrs. Donovan’s. But the song was real music—bright, colorful, and swinging. I felt it tickle my fingertips and my toes.

“That’s good,” Mrs. Donovan told me, and she handed me the sheets of music. “You take this and practice, and soon you’ll be able to play it for a dance party.”

From then on, whenever I walked to Mr. Wong’s studio, I hummed “Fly Me to the Moon” over and over again. If there was ever a moment when I was practicing at his studio



and he wasn’t there, I played “Fly Me to the Moon.” Even when I played Gavotte in G, I was flying to the moon with that dancing beat, the sparkling sound. Mr. Wong shook his head at me.

“Pay attention, Sabrina,” Mr. Wong said to me severely. “This is the song you’ll be playing at the recital. You must practice it.”

Recital! “Fly Me to the Moon” had flown me so far away that I had forgotten. The recital was in three weeks. Mom and Aunt Lily were going to come, and I was going to play Gavotte in G. I’d have to focus more on the gavotte.

Mr. Wong made sure I focused on the gavotte too. He was almost always there when I came to practice, and once in a while he’d stand by and nod his head like a **metronome**. Sometimes Mom would come too, also nodding. I’d hear her talk to Mr. Wong in Chinese about maybe buying a piano. She always thought I didn’t understand when she spoke Chinese, but I knew she was pleased

that I hadn't given up.

In fact, the only person who wasn't pleased was me. At home, sitting in my room, I realized I missed playing "Fly Me to the Moon." I wished I could play that for the recital.

I sat up. Why not? Would I dare? I thought about Aunt Lily and Mom and all the other students and their families at the recital. If I had to play in front of all those people, I wanted to play real music, music that I loved.

But if I wanted to play "Fly Me to the Moon," I'd have to practice it. I couldn't play it at Mr. Wong's. He would probably get mad at me for not wanting to play Gavotte in G. Mrs. Donovan might let me play the piano at school, but that wouldn't be enough. I'd have to practice more than that, and without a piano at home, I'd never be able to play well enough for the recital. Mom and Aunt Lily would be embarrassed at my bad playing, and I would be too. I should give up the idea, I thought.

But somehow, maybe for the first time ever, I felt like I couldn't give up. I could imagine the

keyboard right in front of me. I wanted to reach out and touch the keys. Maybe . . .

I went to my closet and found a long roll of paper, a ruler, and my markers. I spread the paper out on the floor, took a deep breath, and closed my eyes. I could still see the piano keyboard. Slowly, I started to measure and draw and color.

When it was done, I stood up and looked at my drawing. It was perfect. It looked just like the piano keys. I spread the "Fly Me to the Moon" music out in front of me and put the paper piano in front of my lap. Every time I pressed a paper key, I imagined the note. I'd practice the song right here, even without a piano. No, I would not give up.

Finally, recital day came. It was hard for me to sit still while the other students were playing. There was Gavotte in A, Gavotte in C, and then just plain Gavotte. There was "Hunter's Chorus" and Minuet too. When a red-haired boy played that, it actually



sounded kind of nice. His notes floated in the room like falling feathers. Maybe a gavotte was real music, even if it wasn't my favorite.

But then, Mr. Wong said, "And next, playing Gavotte in G, is one of my newest students—Sabrina Liu!"

I came forward and sat down in front of the black piano. My heart was thumping like a drum. The polished wood of the piano was so shiny that I could see a reflection of myself and all the audience—Mr. Wong and all the students, Mom and Aunt Lily, even Mrs. Donovan, whom I specially invited. Suddenly, I was scared. Maybe playing "Fly Me to the Moon" wasn't a good idea after all. Should I play Gavotte in G? My hands seemed to be tied together, and I could only stare.

I looked at the piano keys in front of me. At that moment, I didn't want to play anything. I just wanted to shrink into one of the black buttons on the piano bench and run away. There was a loud silence in the room as everyone sat, waiting for me.

Climax begins here

I'm not going to give up, I told myself and closed my eyes. I saw the keys of my paper piano and stretched my hands toward them. When I started to play, I pretended I was playing my paper piano, with the notes dancing in my head.

But this time the music jumped into the air for everyone to hear. And it didn't just fly. It played and skipped and **cavorted** and **beckoned**. "Fly Me to the Moon" flew to everyone, hopping from person to person, making each one smile and sway. I was tip-



tapping too, lost in my own celebrating party of sound.

When I opened my eyes, I was almost surprised to see the real piano in front of me. There was a small silence as I looked at the audience. I saw Mr. Wong and Mom, smiling, but looking confused. Then Mrs. Donovan stood up and clapped, shouting, "Bravo!"

The rest of the audience joined her and I grinned. Mr. Wong led me into my curtsy. "That was a very unusual gavotte," he whispered to me. "Perhaps we will have to change books to some more modern music for our future lessons."

I nodded happily and sat down next to Mom.

"That was a surprise," she said. "I think we'll have to get a piano for our house now."

I nodded again. "I told you I wouldn't give up," I said to Mom proudly. My grin was almost bursting off of my face. I had made music—real music. Music that I wanted to make. 

Grace Lin

Like so many of Grace Lin's wonderful books and stories, "Making Music" was inspired by her family. Her grandparents, who lived in Taiwan, couldn't afford to buy a piano. So their daughter (Grace's mom, whose name is, fabulously, Lin-Lin Lin) practiced on a paper keyboard. Grace doesn't know this, but we dreamed for many years of having her write for *Storyworks*. And so for us, "Making Music" is a dream come true.

When Grace was a girl, she planned on being a cashier when she grew up. She changed her mind when she learned she wouldn't be allowed to keep all the money.



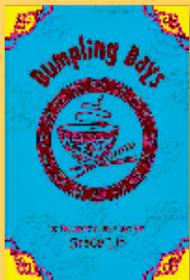
Grace loves to travel. Here she is in France, "visiting" the French version of her Newbery Honor book, *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*.



Grace is the first person to both write and illustrate a story for *Storyworks*. Take a look at the sketch she created for the picture on page 13.



WRITE TO WIN!



The climax of "Making Music" is when Sabrina decides to play "Fly Me to the Moon" at the recital. Why is this moment so important in the story? Write your answer in a well-organized paragraph and e-mail or send it to "Music Contest" by Feb. 15, 2012. Ten winners will each receive a copy of Grace Lin's new book, *Dumpling Days*. See page 2 for details.

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