

Maxine's Melody

By

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I urinated on the pregnancy strip and sat there staring and waiting. I waited for the lines to appear that would determine my future. A single tear hit the floor of my grandmother's tiny bathroom.

"Maxine, come out of the bathroom. You've been in there forever!" my sister yelled.

"I'm coming," I replied

"Hurry up!"

I wiped my swollen eyes. My hands trembled like a thunderbolt had just struck me. I clutched the test, the room spun. I could no longer hear my little sister banging on the door. My legs were like barbells. Each step was heavy and hard to take.

Clutching the pregnancy test like a weapon, I exited the bathroom. Slamming the door to take it off the hinges. This horrible thing can't be true. It was happening to someone else. I felt pity for the pregnant girl. *She is only seventeen and pregnant by a ballet dancer who passed through D.C. on his way to Europe. How could she possibly believe the lies he told her? She was stupid, but I still felt pity for her. Maybe it's a joke. Perhaps it's not true.*

Crumpled and damp tissues were all over my bedroom floor. For two hours, I rehearsed everything I could have done differently.

I didn't go to school. I told my grandmother I had a headache and cramps. I was slumped on the sofa when Liam, Olivia, and Ava came by after school.

"Hey, Max, where were you today? We missed you in class, and you skipped the White House trip," said Liam.

"Just not feeling up to it," I replied.

"What's going on? You never miss anything," Olivia said.

"Life, I guess. Everything's changing, and I'm not sure how to deal with it," I replied.

"Okay, spill. What's really happening?" Ava asked, moving closer to me.

"I... I'm pregnant," I said, looking at the floor as tears fell.

"Wait, pregnant? You?" Ava stammered.

"This has to be some kind of joke, Max!" said Olivia.

"How could this happen!" Liam said, "Well, I know how, but."

"It just did. I never thought I'd be the one dealing with this," I said.

"Max, we're here for you. But seriously, I can't wrap my head around it," Ava said softly.

"We'll figure it out together, okay," said Oliva while giving me a bear hug.

"Thanks, guys. I just needed someone to know. Everything's just so messed up right now," I said.

"We got your back, Max. We're in this together," said Liam.

I went into early labor two days before my audition at Julliard. I gave birth to a baby girl. She was born into a world full of love, even though I was only seventeen. My grandmother, sister, and three friends helped make everything a little easier.

We were scheduled to graduate high school in five months. I was determined to secure my spot in Julliard's jazz orchestra program so my baby and I could have a decent future. I wrote for an extension. They granted it, but the composition I had to play was more complex as a

penalty for missing the first audition appointment. I had already rehearsed the previous sheet music. Now, I had to start from scratch. I had two weeks to study the sheet music.

Liam, Olivia, and Ava took turns coming over every day to help out. Olivia even made a schedule so they would have time to prepare for their own auditions. Liam had already secured an internship with a production studio in New York. Julliard sought out Olivia. She didn't have to audition. They came looking for her to attend school there because she was a great ballet dancer. Ava had an upcoming audition to travel with the cast of Hamilton after graduation. She was working with a voice coach to improve her already angelic speaking voice.

"What is it, Max? I know that look," Olivia asked while rocking the baby to sleep.

"I'm scared. I have no idea what I'm doing. I think I made a mistake," I said.

"What do you mean?"

"Maybe she would be better off if I had put her up for adoption. I don't have anything to offer her."

"You'll be okay. We will help you. You guys are not alone."

"I'm about to run out of pampers and formula," I said with tears in my eyes.

"Oh no! Why didn't you say something before now?" Olivia said.

She put the baby in her crib, hugged me tightly, and left for dance practice.

I stayed up all night studying music. I was late for English Lit the next day. I failed the pop quiz in Math class, and as I dragged myself home after school, I could barely keep my eyes open.

Grandma met me at the door, handed me the baby, and went straight to her room.

Liam burst into the door behind me with bags in each hand.

"Liam, what are you doing?" I said.

"Ya boy is here to save the day as usual," he said.

"I heard my favorite girl was running low on diapers and stuff. I had some money lying around, and well."

"Oh, Liam, I can't thank you enough! I'll pay you back every penny."

He stayed to help with the baby so I could sleep. He stayed all night to give me a chance to study my music and catch up on late school assignments.

Olivia worked out a plan to get me to my audition. She and Liam would babysit while Ava and I went to New York on the train. Ava skipped her voice lessons so I wouldn't have to travel to New York alone.

I rubbed my sweaty hands on my jeans and clutched my saxophone case to my chest the whole train ride.

"You're gonna break your fingers if you don't loosen your grip on that sax, girl," Ava said, smiling.

"What if I don't get in? What will I do? I have a baby to take care of," I said.

"You'll be okay, Maxine. Now, get yourself together. We're almost there," she said.

When we arrived, I learned I would share the audition time with another girl. The judges had to divide the time between us because I missed my initial audition.

"I don't see why I have to share my time with you. I heard you got knocked up by some ballet dancer. Of all the low-class, dumb things to do," said Zuri.

"Shut up, Zuri," Ava's voice thundered.

I stared at Zuri for a moment, and tears started to fall. I tripped over my feet getting away from her. No matter how fast I walked, her voice got louder and louder. The word dumb echoed over and over. I stopped walking and turned around.

"My personal life has nothing to do with my talent; I'm here to play, not entertain baseless rumors," I said, sniffing and wiping my eyes.

"You have no idea what Max is going through, and you have no right to judge her. She's stronger than you'll ever be," said Ava.

"You think you can just waltz into Julliard after getting knocked up? They won't take a talentless teenage mother. You're ruining your life and dragging everyone down with you," Zuri said.

"You know, Zuri, I may face unexpected challenges, but that doesn't make me weak. It makes me stronger than you could ever understand. Julliard isn't just about talent; it's about passion, resilience, and the ability to rise above adversity. You may be a skilled musician, but your heart is out of tune," I said.

"You have NO talent," she said, coming towards me, waiving her violin bow.

"I'd be careful with that bow if I were you. You may think you're hitting the right notes, but in reality, you're just sad and pathetic. I won't let your bitterness tarnish my melody. Watch me rise above the noise, not just today but every day after this because, unlike you, I'm not afraid to face the music of life head-on, and I have friends who love me."

Everyone in the hallway started clapping. My face turned beet red, and I wiped away the bucket of sweat on my forehead.

Zuri performed first. With sax in hand, I walked out onto the stage with my head held high. I could see Grandma, my sister, and Liam sitting just behind the judges. Olivia was sitting beside Liam with the baby in her arms. I had no idea they were coming. I looked at Ava to my left off stage and then played the best rendition of "St. Thomas" by Sonny Rollins. When I finished, the judges deliberated and decided to give me the spot over Zuri.

My three friends and I celebrated after. They promised to always be there for me and my baby girl.