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The Sound of Tomorrow

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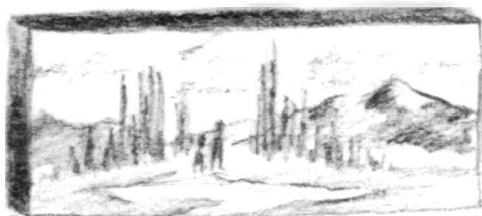
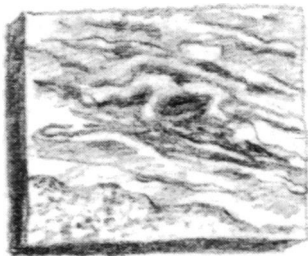


ARTISTS
emotion-charged
moments

THE SOUND OF TOMORROW

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY BECKY BOND





the hall, and her mother always worried too much about Jessica's special "little problem," anyway.

But what would she do without Abby? Jessie's world was shattered.

Slipping out of bed, the petite teenager stepped silently to the north wall. There, she searched desperately through the details of each of the 30 or 40 paintings hanging in their order of completion. The family scenes, the seascapes, the landscapes, and the portraits. Jessica moved across the hardwood floor slowly and squinted through the shadows at the lonely still lifes. They, too, held no answers for her.

Jessie's lips tightened, then slowly quivered. She shook her head slowly from side to side as she shuffled backward toward the bed.

Her breathing increased again, and more tears streaked the delicate features of her face.

Her steps began to falter. In a silent motion, Jessie reached to the bedpost but missed. Her balance was thrown off as she awkwardly fell to the floor. Pain gripped Jessica's arm, but only momentarily. She blinked, stunned. There was something she had neglected, something more important.

There, under her bed, was a painting she had yet to hang. Without haste, Jessie crawled to her knees and gingerly pulled out the painting. Her eyes widened as she touched the unfinished landscape. She was...breathless. It was the very last project she and Abby had worked on together. "The Sunrise."

Jessica eased the canvas onto her bed and smoothed the sheets around it. She quickly brushed back her long, flowing hair with the flick of a nimble wrist, as if to ward off anything that would interfere with her view.

As her fingers moved along the weaves of the canvas and onto a few smooth strokes of the acrylic paint, Jessie could almost envision Mrs. Whitney sitting with her. A smile spread over her youthful face. She remembered Abby's graceful hands fumbling through the words: "Sunrise...always another sunrise," in her self-made beautifully unique style of sign language. Mrs. Whitney was a special, one-of-a-kind person.

Jessica froze. She spun toward her clock. "6:24 a.m.," she told herself. She ran to the window by her bed and pressed her cheek to the cold, wet pane, straining to see if light

had yet dawned. Jessie sighed with relief; the edge of darkness was still touching the distant horizon line. With a sparkling smile she glided to her closet. Her feet bounced with excitement as she grabbed her favorite jeans, sweater, and shoes.

No one was in sight as Jessie peered from her bedroom door. She was still struggling to get an arm through her sweater sleeve while rushing down the hall, but managed to remember to leave a note for her mother. "I hope she won't always have to worry about me," sighed Jessie. Yet, without

Even though she was never privileged to tune in to voices, or laughter, or noise in general, her heart was fine-tuned to one thing this morning, and there was only one more block to go.

Jessica tossed in her sleep again. As so many times before, she began to breathe unevenly, and she could feel her eyes beginning to water.

"No, Abby, No!" A dreaded thought pounded over and over in her heart and mind. "Don't leave me! Please don't leave me, Abby!"

Jessie bolted upright on her bed. She was sweating. She was cold. As she hugged her bare shoulders, Jessica scanned her moonlit room in an effort to place herself.

Her relentless digital clock read 5:07, or was it 6:07? Jessie rubbed her blurry eyes, wiped her teary cheeks, and took a deep breath. "6:07 a.m.," she told herself. "Exactly two months and four days since Abby. ...," well, since Jessie's last painting lesson from the renowned Abigale Whitney.

What a wonderful, talented person Mrs. Whitney was! "Abby's" words were as flowing and descriptive as her brush on canvas. To think that she had refused a professorship "to waste her time on me," thought Jessica.

Jessie's sobs came heavy. She covered her mouth in order not to awaken her family. Her parents' room was just down

hesitation, she firmly set the note down, lifted her chin a little, and turned toward the door.

Once outside, Jessica slipped her other arm into her warm cardigan. She took a long, deep breath of the morning air. The smell of dew on the wet grass was stimulating. The sky was still grayish, and only a slight crimson glow eased itself over the rolling hillside. As she strained to see the treetops peeping over the city buildings, offices, and shops, Jessie pulled her golden hair from under her sweater and slipped on her warm mittens from her pockets. These were special, too. Abby had loved them almost as much as Jessie did.

Leaves were falling with the swirling wind. Tiny dust bowls lifted from the paved streets and raced out of sight. Cars and trucks whizzed by, even at this early hour. Cityfolk of all ages passed in front of, to the side of, and behind her. All were scurrying to and fro, most of them heading to their shops or work, for Jessica had been here before. Even the scampering dogs and lazy cats that crossed her path didn't bother Jessica. She never faltered from the same route she had always taken.

Despite the frantic atmosphere of city life, Jessica couldn't even hear a falling feather because she was engulfed in a world of her own: the private, often lonely world of the deaf. To Jessica, however, sometimes her "little problem" was a downright blessing.

Even though she was never privileged to tune in to voices, or laughter, or noise in general, her heart was fine-tuned to one thing this morning, and there was only one more block to go.

Finally she rounded the corner by Garland's Market at the end of Main and jogged down the slope behind it. The grass had grown taller since her last visit. Now she could smell the evergreens and the damp bark from trees that were losing their shrubbery. Jessie picked up her pace.

She could see the grayness being lifted and replaced by a warm ray of color. Oh, how she yearned for her mother's camera. Before she realized it, Jessica had flown into the clearing. She nearly tripped over the rocks she and Abby used to sit on to paint the surrounding scenes. She had made it just in time.

Jessica felt her heartbeat change. She stared at the rock where Abby used to sit. Suddenly, she wondered how many other eager students had shared Abby's attention, in this same clearing. For a moment, jealousy came over her. But her selfishness disappeared just as quickly. Only she, Mrs. Whitney, and her nosey little brother knew of this lovely spot. They had found it together. As for Johnny, he tagged along once in a while to "protect" his older sister, but she loved him for it anyway.

With her back against Abby's rock, Jessica tilted her head upward. She grinned softly as the sunrise developed. A peach haze faded into a glimmering yellow. Ever so slowly, the splash of warm pastels melted into the distance. The central lemon-yellow ball vibrated upward as a sliver of scarlet caressed its burning edges. Whispers of gray mists were pulled across the sky like stretched cotton. If it were not for two or three splotches of trees in the foreground, the horizon line would be perfect. Of course, "Life's never perfect," as Abby would say.

Jessica closed her eyes to savor the view she had just witnessed and to tuck that memory far in the deep treasures of her mind forever. She inhaled the cool, clean air. Relaxation tingled through her senses as she rubbed her shoulders with her mitten-clad hands.

The "young artist" within her loved crisp, clear dawns. The "rest" loved wearing big sweaters, warm clothes, and fur-lined boots. Most of all, though, she dearly treasured her mittens.

She opened her eyes to look over her handmade pair. A grin warmed her face as she remembered when and how she had learned to knit them. So many stitches were out of place! So many rows were accidentally left out! Abby, however, beamed with delight throughout that wonderful afternoon of knitting, and she literally raved about the mittens after they were finished. She was so tender, yet forceful in an almost deceiving way. Jessie reflected that Abby had an uncanny ability to get people involved in whatever she wanted them to do.

Jessie was glad they had decided not to apint on that cold, rainy day. Abby was, too. She changed the lesson plan and taught knitting instead. As it turned out, her sewing served as a color project, also. Especially with the crazy scraps of yarn Abby had brought in her shopping bag of a purse.

While Jessie stitched together one green mitten and knitted another green, red, and yellow one, Abigale was working on more than just her own knitting. She was creating much more than Jessie could imagine.

Jessie remembered how Abby suddenly became very still. Her knitting needles were lying in her lap. She looked so tired. Then, Abby seemed to snap out of the daze she was in, and she directed a warm smile at Jessie.

She lifted her aged hands slowly and began to speak to Jessica in her gently but awkward sign language. Jessie stopped her knitting and watched as Abby spelled out her words with her hands and her expressions.

"What will you do tomorrow, Jessica?" Abby motioned.

Jessica only shrugged her shoulders. She started to knit purple yarn into the wristband. Then she held up her mitten-to-be and smiled as if to joke, "Maybe I should be knitting tomorrow!"

Abby grinned. She caught Jessie's eye so "Jess" could read her lips.

"Will you please paint the sunrise I showed you?" Abby mouthed slowly.

Jessica hated it when people spoke extremely slow and exaggerated, but it was funny when Mrs. Whitney did it. A smile. A nod.

"Yes, yes," replied Abby, relieved. "Good, good. But what about real classes in school? You'll meet so many fine teachers, Jessica!" she mouthed, excitedly.

The thought of another instructor caught Jessica off guard. Mrs. Abigale Whitney was the most famous artist around, although she had officially retired several years before. Jessie needed no one else, or so she thought.

She dropped her needles and picked up her sketchbook. With one quick, clean motion, she drew the front of the local public school and marked a huge red "X" over it.

"No matter what the hardship, Jessica, there is always a tomorrow. Always more to learn, and always another sunrise."