

“God is working on it. He will let us know when He is done...”

Rebecca Flores

backspace



*A Musical
Adventure*

Available in print and digital formats online at amazon.com

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“Play it, April... like it’s the last song you are ever gonna play...”

Lucas Talcott

“What... in God’s name, do we do now?”

Abigail Foster

“Like the kid once said... ‘dumbass’...”

April Robinson

“Did we really do all that?”

Jeremiah Tarahonso

“I’m still trying to figure out how I got stuck with the girls...”

Chase Gray

PROLOGUE

①

“Good morning!” rings out through the church.

“It most certainly is, Pastor!” the lone occupant replies.

“And... how do you know I’m the Pastor?”

“Would have to be all the faith oozing out of you, of course!” the older guy replies, standing and holding out his hand to the young man, as he stops next to the pew he is in.

“Well... as you are here in the church, before most people are awake, I’m thinking you are a fairly faith-bound person yourself... Mr.?”

“Maxwell... but everyone calls me CJ.”

“Well now, CJ... I’m pretty sure you aren’t a member of my congregation... well... yet, anyhow.”

“No sir... just passing through. I tend to stop when possible, and go over life’s itinerary with Him...” he pauses, and points upward, “...every so often, just so he knows I’m still listening.”

“Interesting...” the young man replies, holding out his hand to indicate CJ should sit. “If I can be nosey, how in the world did you end up in Wauneta, Nebraska?”

“Truth be told, I’m looking for something... and I’m pretty sure the best place to find it, is going to be in rural America...”

“Might I ask what it is you are in search of?”

The very moment the pastor poses the question, the church is suddenly filled with the amazingly beautiful sound of a piano.

With a huge grin on his face, CJ waves his arms, and calmly replies, “That...”



②

I’d been talking to James – the Pastor – for about thirty minutes, when God decided to end my search. Interestingly enough, He decided to do it in one of His houses...

In the middle of a sentence, the church was filled by someone playing the piano. No sooner than I smiled at the Pastor, the most incredible voice I had ever heard – *period* – pretty much made my heart stop. The look on my face, immediately gave me away...

“HA! She got you too!” James blurted out, following it with a laugh.

“Yes...” I replied, “Yes she did...”

“That would be Miss Flores. She’s also the one playing the piano...”

“Might I be able to meet her?” I asked, hoping for a positive response.

“Well... just don’t make a big deal out of her abilities. It’s a weird sort of touchy thing with the kid. That’s why she practices so early in the morning...”

“Let’s see if we can rectify that little issue, shall we?” I asked, standing as I did.

Looking a bit confused, he stood and led me to the back of the church, around a corner, and into a large

room that was probably a meeting room at one time. I found it full of musical instruments, and one bubbly little kid, gently stroking the keys of a large Steinway Grand Piano, and singing her heart out. The moment she saw us, she stopped.

“Pastor James?” she blurted out, appearing nervous.

Before he could answer, I did.

“While your playing is amazing in itself, young lady, I have to believe that *He...*” I paused, took a seat on the bench next to her, and pointed straight up with my index finger, “...has His hands in that amazing voice.”

The child’s response was so strange, that even the pastor seemed shocked by it. All the nervousness and intensity, drained out of her in a single heartbeat, and she smiled.

“Yeah... you’re probably right, Mr....”

“Maxwell. CJ Maxwell, at your service, Miss Flores.” I held out my hand, she took it, and gave it a gentle shake.

“Don’t forget you need to leave for school in twenty minutes, Rebecca,” James offered, then turned and disappeared out the door.

“Wow... I guess my heart was right,” the kid offered, turning and looking me right in the eyes.

“About?”

“Must be some reason Pastor James felt comfortable with leaving me alone with you...”

“Probably the same reason I turned around a mile down the road, and came back here this morning,” I replied, grinning.

We stared at each other for a moment, and when we smiled at the same time, we each pointed up with our index fingers...



③

It took me close to a year to find her, and another seven months to convince her (with *His* help ☺) that I wasn't crazy. The first time I heard her sing one of the songs, I knew I had my vocalist...

Now... all I had to do, was build a band...



④

My name is Maxwell... CJ Maxwell. I could tell you my full name... but everyone who knows me uses my initials – CJ. If you follow the story, you will eventually find out what the C and J are for.

Now... the story – well... it's about an idea I had a few years back, and what came of it.

With a little effort, I found a means to act on this idea, which eventually ran totally rampant, and inevitably, got completely out of control... which in this case, isn't a bad thing.

Ultimately, my 'idea' became *backspace*. They're a band. If you've ever watched music videos on YouTube, you've probably seen them – more so, during their brief 'famous' period.

They were essentially, a cover band – something a lot of people seemed to find puzzling. I suppose that if they were to put their minds to it, they could have easily created some original material, but that’s not a direction any of them were interested in traveling. For each of the six of them, music was – and still is – simply a passion. None of them wanted to make it a ‘career’.

The really interesting thing about *backspace* – none of the members ever made a dime off what they did. The truth of the matter is, they gave a lot of money and ‘stuff’ away to *the kids*. Their audiences made out via donations to their school’s music programs...

But, I’m going to let them explain it to you – one at time.

While the five musicians who eventually become *backspace*, will be doing the narrating for the most part, the person this story is actually about – Rebecca Flores – will turn up eventually.

Rebecca is, bluntly put, a miracle, and everyone involved in this escapade, feels fortunate on a scale we can’t explain, to have had her pass through our lives. The four years we were exposed to her were a life lesson – one that none of us will ever get to repeat.

So... all that being said, in the words of the bass player, taken directly from one of the more popular songs *backspace* covered, let’s **ROCK THE MIC!!**





Saturday, April 25th

Ft. Collins, Colorado

Joe's Café

April Robinson

People are always telling me how they ‘noticed’ someone, for no particular reason. A face in a crowd, someone’s eyes, or maybe, just how they were walking. That’s not me. I’m not sure if I’m weird, or just too focused, but unless there is some kind of definitive encounter between us, the chances I will ‘notice’ you, are slim to none. I’ll apologize now, if that makes me sound shallow or even superficial. Thing is, I’m at a point in my life, where ‘purpose’ is all I seem to see. I’m going to be a doctor, and for now, it is the all-consuming thing in my life.

The reason I just explained all that, is because for the first time in my life, I am about to ‘notice’ someone.

And it pretty much weirds me out.

My name is April, and I live in Ft. Collins, Colorado. I’m a senior at CSU – Colorado State University – and in about a month, I graduate and move on to medical school. At least, that’s the plan...

My epiphany occurs in the most unlikely of places – a small café near the campus. My one single non-education related passion is music. Over the years, I’ve become what a lot of people would call very proficient

at playing guitar – simply because I wanted to. It's also my means of release. Whenever life stresses me out, I find a quiet place and I play. Other than hearing my grandfather's voice, it's the one thing that can calm me in a matter of seconds.

So... my epiphany. It's Saturday afternoon, and one of my friends talks me into playing acoustic backup for her, while she sings at the weekly open mic night. They let us set up and practice a bit in the afternoon, and the performances start at 6:00 pm. I'm strumming away, working on one of the songs Megan is going to sing, when I 'notice' him. He's sitting alone, typing away on a small laptop on the table in front of him. I never do catch him looking at me, but I somehow sense that his presence has something to do with me.

Weird, right?

Once we are done rehearsing, I look around and find that he's gone.

Five hours later, he again gets my attention.

Megan always tries to open the show, to keep from having to follow some of the really good people who perform here. Halfway through our two-song set, I see him – table six, center of the room. His eyes are closed, and he seems to be rocking – or maybe the term should be 'folking'? – out to our song. I glance at him on and off, between songs, and he is once again typing away on his laptop. At one point, we make brief eye contact, as I am singing some backup verses, and I'm certain he actually smiles at me!

Once the lights go out, we get a pretty energetic round of applause (Megan is actually a regular here) and I start putting my guitar away. Megan hugs me, and then disappears into the crowd of performers waiting their turn. I make my way off stage, and then hesitate, as I glance around the room, looking for *him*.

He's not at his table, and the laptop is gone as well. I find myself slightly depressed by his absence. I'm also smart enough to know that this whole incident is gonna drive me nuts for the rest of the night...

"Hey, April!" I hear from behind me. I turn and find Pamela – a waitress – walking toward me. She stops, hands me the glass on her tray, and then laughs. "I never knew you were into 'older guys' – although he is seriously cute..."

"*Huh?*" I ask, taking the glass and giving her a 'look'.

"He..." she pauses, turns towards the bar, and points, "...bought you the drink. I asked him if there was a message to go with it, and he just cracked up."

My eyes follow her finger and find my mystery man, sitting on the last stool, at the end of the bar. I feel myself smile, as he blatantly winks at me. I lift the glass to my lips and am not even slightly surprised – Seagram's and Seven Up. Go figure.

"Thanks, Pammy! I suppose I should go introduce myself, huh?"

"You don't know him?"

"Not yet..."

I take another sip of the drink, turn and head for the bar.

"Good evening, Miss Robinson..."

"*Miss Robinson?* Everyone thinks I'm dating you... so if you keep calling me Miss, you're gonna kinda blow that myth..." I reply taking the stool next to him. When all he does is stare at me, I laugh and take another sip of my drink. "Well... strange look. Was it your intention to ask me out?"

"Only in my dreams, young lady..." he quickly replies, giving me a *seriously* devious smirk.

“Well... not only do you know who I am, but what I drink as well. Care to reciprocate?”

“CJ Maxwell, at your service. *And...*” he lifts his glass and rattles the ice in it, “Seagram’s ginger ale – on the rocks.”

I crack up laughing – I simply can’t help myself. About this time, the next act starts their set, and as it gets louder, I lean in close to my new friend. He meets me halfway.

“Wanna get a table outside – where we can hear?”

He smiles at me, finishes what’s in his glass, and then holds out his hand.

“After you!”

He follows me out, and down the front of the building to the last sidewalk table – one at the end opposite the stage. He even pulls out my chair for me – which makes me smile.

“So... what’s going on?” I ask, as he takes a seat across from me.

“I need a guitarist.”

“*Huh?*”

“I need a guitarist. Thing is... I need a really good guitarist.”

“And you’re talking to me because?”

“Really?” he shoots back at me, laughing as he does.

After a second, I join him, as I too, start laughing.

“You’ve been playing that thing,” he pauses and points at my case, on the ground at my feet, “...since you were ten. However,” He pauses, and gives me the most sincere smile I think I’ve ever seen in my life, “...unlike a lot of musicians, *it’s not your life...* it’s simply become *the passion* that helps you deal with your life...”

“How in God’s name would you know that?” I blurt out.

“I know all about you, April. But relax... it’s all public knowledge – honest.”

I suck down what’s left in my glass, put the glass on the table and look him in the eyes. When he smiles at me again, I simply relax... I don’t even know why.

“Am I going to need another one of those?” I ask, pointing at the empty glass, and laughing.

“Only if you want one. All you need do is say the word, young lady, and I’m out of here. It’s not my intention to freak you out or pressure you – I swear.”

“Why do you need a guitarist?”

“For a band, you doofus... what else?”

Again, he makes me crack up. There is just something so totally... well... ‘comfortable’ about the guy.

“When?”

“As soon as you are available. Your education comes first.”

“Well... finals are in two weeks, and then there’s the inevitable fallout afterwards...”

This time he laughs.

“Where is all this going to happen?” I ask.

“Right here.”

“Really?”

“Yep.”

“Do I know any of your other ‘recruits’?”

“Nope... but then, there are still some unresolved issues in that area. You were on my ‘not sure how she’ll react’ list, so I kinda started with you.”

Although I already know the answer, I force myself not to seem over-anxious, and I bite my lip.

“Can I think about it?”

“Absolutely! *‘Think about it’* isn’t *no...* so I can work with that.”

“What else can you tell me?”

“Nothing. Everyone finds out the particulars at the same time.”

“This is going to prove interesting...” I arbitrarily blurt out, without thinking.

He falls out laughing so hard, the people at the other tables start looking at us.

“And the ‘think about it part’?” he asks, smiling and winking at me.

“Oh hush, damn it. You knew you had me fifteen minutes ago...”

And so begins the most amazing adventure I will ever have in this lifetime.



2

Friday, May 1st

Ft. Collins, Colorado

Praeludium Music

Lucas Talcott

I saw the guy waiting on me, even before Sarah told me about him. Older guy, short gray hair, clean shaven, and typing away on a small laptop, since he arrived. The only time he stopped was when I was showing Kimberly a technique on the piano. He lifted his head, closed his eyes, and didn't move until I stopped playing. I only noticed because the piano faces the door, which has a big window in it.

“Okay Kim... see you next Friday, right?”

“Yes, Mr. Talcott.”

“And... make sure you do the exercises... I'll be able to tell. Besides, your mom will rat you out if you don't...”

I open the door, and as she goes out, she's laughing. I cross the waiting room and drop into the chair next to the guy waiting on me. He continues typing for another twenty seconds, then stops and offers me his hand.

“CJ.”

“Lucas.”

“I appreciate your taking the time to talk to me, Lucas. I can see how busy you are...”

“Ehh... not that big a deal really. Most of them are fulfilling high school credits. Any chance to get out of school... even if it is a music lesson...” I offer, laughing.

“Well... I’m really not buying that one. Twenty-four, business owner, supports all the public schools in the area, as well as CSU, amazing business reputation with the entire community, and still finds time to personally teach kids to play. Sorry dude, that *definitely* constitutes ‘busy’.”

His demeanor, as well as the conviction and strength in his voice, make me pause and pay attention. I sit up, and face him.

“How much trouble am I in?” I ask.

“Trouble?”

“Well... if you know that much about me, you’ve done some research. Question is... for what?”

He laughs – rather loudly.

“Pretty astute. And... truth is, I just need a keyboard player.”

“Seriously?”

“Yep.”

I find myself suddenly intrigued.

“For?”

“A band. Thing is... I need a really good one.”

“I see. Well... I’m not sure...”

That’s as far as I get. He closes the laptop, stands up, and with a smile, holds out his hand to me.

“Well then, I’m sorry to have interrupted your day. Thanks for at least listening to me.”

Stunned to silence, I hesitate taking his hand, and feel my face wrinkle into a frown.

“That’s it?”

“Mr. Talcott...”

“Lucas... please. I have enough school kids doing the whole ‘Mr.’ thing on a daily basis.”

“Lucas, I’m the most low-pressure person you will ever encounter in this life. Unlike your busy and full life, nothing in mine is even close to ‘mission-critical’. You give the impression that you aren’t really interested, and with everything else on your daily ‘plate’, I’m more than prepared to accept that. It’s just goofy idea, conjured up by a silly old fart, with too much time on his hands.”

I stand, and look him in the eyes. Something in the deep vastness of them tells me I need to listen to whatever he has to say – God only knows why. I glance at the clock on the wall, then smile and turn back to face him.

“Next lesson is in forty-six minutes. You’ve got that long to share this idea...”

“Nicely played, sir... and a very good start.”

“Meaning?”

“You said ‘share the idea’, instead of ‘convince me’. Only Lucas can convince Lucas of anything.”

“Yeah, CJ... I think we are going to get along...”

I hold out my hand and follow him to the front of the store, stopping at counter.

“Sarah, Mr. ...” I turn and look at him.

“Maxwell...” he quickly offers.

“... and I are going to get some coffee, and have a chat about a band. I’ll be back before Ross gets here.”

“A band? Which band...?”

When all I do is smile, her eyes get big – which is exactly what I anticipated.

“o... m... g...” she mumbles, and turns to face Mr. Maxwell. “You absolutely have the right guy, Mr. Maxwell...”

“We’ll know one way or the other, in about forty minutes, Sarah. And it’s CJ... everyone calls me CJ.”

“Follow me,” I offer, turning towards the door. “The best cup of plain old coffee in Ft. Collins is just three doors down.”

“You’re speaking my language, dude...” CJ replies.

I have no idea just how drastically life is about to change.



3

Friday, May 8th

Los Angeles, California

Discovery Studios

Chase Gray

“No guys... that isn’t working!” Robert bellows through the studio speakers.

We all turn to look in the direction of the booth, and find him sitting at the console. I immediately notice the new guy, standing at the back of the booth, watching.

“What’s the problem?” Rick asks, shaking his head.

“Probably me...” I mumble, turning to adjust the knobs on the amp behind me.

“Not sure,” Robert replies. “Let’s call it a day and we’ll meet here in the morning and discuss it.”

“Sorry guys...” I again mumble, as I unplug and start to power things down.

Keith, the drummer, walks over to me, and puts a hand on my shoulder.

“Chase... dude... you can let it go man. No hard feelings. We get it... honest to God...” he offers.

“Ditto,” comes from Mack, the bass player.

“I’m not sure what the hell my problem is guys...”

Amanda, the keyboard player, laughs and kisses me on the cheek. At the same time, I notice that the new

guy and Robert are headed out of the booth. I find myself wondering who he is... and if I just screwed things up for the rest of the band.

“You told us when we started this, you weren’t sure if you’d fit. You’ve always been totally honest with us, Chase. If you aren’t feeling it in here,” Amanda pauses and taps on my chest, “it’s not gonna work no matter how hard we try.”

“She’s right, Chase,” comes from Robert, as he crosses the studio and stops next to us. “It was a shot in the dark, dude – a long shot. You weren’t playing with anyone, and they needed someone. You gave it a try, and that’s all we can ask of you.”

I hang my head and feeling really guilty, say, “This sucks...”

“Naw... not really. I’ll call around in the morning and see who wants to try out. We’ll find someone, man.”

When I look at Robert, he’s grinning at me, which makes me wonder. The others are smiling as well, which allows me to relax a bit. It’s then I realize that the guy, who had been in the booth, isn’t with Robert.

I glance at each of them, then with a smile, say, “I think this is the first time I’ve ever been fired...”

“If I come up with something else, should I call you – or are you going on hold for a bit?” Robert asks.

“I dunno... gimme a couple of weeks at least. I may go home for a while... and ‘reflect’...”

Everyone cracks up laughing, as I put my guitar in its case. Once I’m ready to go, I shake Robert’s hand, tell the others to stay in touch, and head for the bus stop out front. It’s only a fifteen-minute bus ride to my apartment.

I make it as far as the lobby.

“So... do you want to play... or are ya gonna chill for a bit?” the guy from the booth asks. He’s sitting in one of the over-stuffed lobby chairs, typing away on a small laptop, and doesn’t even look up at me.

“And you are?” I ask, in reply to his question.

“CJ Maxwell.”

“I see. And you are here because?”

“I’m *trying* to recruit a guitarist...” he replies, as he stops typing and finally looks at me.

“Thank God...” I mumble, as I drop into a chair opposite him.

“For?”

“I was really worried I’d screwed things up the rest of the band...”

He laughs, closes the laptop, and stares at me for a moment.

“So...” I ask, breaking the silence, “having just witnessed that major screw up...” I point in the direction of the studio, “...why are you talking to me?”

“That...” he points the same direction I did, “...was nothing more than a traffic dot on the road of life, dude. We all have them...”

When I don’t say anything, he quickly adds, “*And... above all else, Chase Gray loves music.*”

Now, I’m a bit concerned.

“And you know this how?”

“Research, my young friend. When I set about a task, I tend to be a bit anal about it. I have an idea, and in order to pull it off, I’m going to need the best. Gotta be passionate, to be the best... you know?”

My total lack of response, makes him laugh – again.

“Let’s see... two years at the Northern California School of Music, two years at South Bay School of Music Arts, and three years at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, which resulted in a Master of Music degree and a Master of Arts as well.”

Now... I’m completely weirded out.

“If you are trying to freak me out, it’s working,” I offer, looking right at him.

“Not at all, Mr. Gray...”

“Kinda weird, dude...”

“Chase?”

“Yeah... that works. Now, what the hell is going on?”

“I told you, I’m attempting to recruit a guitarist – a lead guitarist to be exact.”

When all I can seem to do is sit staring at him, once again he laughs.

“You find this amusing?”

“Hell yeah!” he replies. “You desperately want to find somewhere you fit – musically. It wasn’t in there,” he points at the studio. “It wasn’t with either of the bands you played with while you were at the Conservatory. For the last four years, Chase Grey has been struggling to find where his total and complete love of music belongs – where he and it fit in the world of music. I’m just offering you another chance to find out. If it doesn’t work, all you lose is a little time.”

“What kind of music are we talking about here?” I ask, admittedly intrigued.

“Hopefully, the kind that captures your soul, and the hearts and minds of those you’ll be playing it for. Isn’t that what music is all about?”

“Not gonna tell me, are you?”

“Nope.”

Something about this guy has captured me. I think it's *his passion* – about whatever it is he's up to. It's on his face, and fills his eyes. Whatever the plan is, he has already convinced himself that it *will* work.

“Okay...” I blurt out, feeling the big grin as it spreads across my face, “...I'm in. Where do I need to get to?”

“The airport. When can you leave?”

“Two days. I need to put some things in order.”

“Fair enough. Will a 5:00 pm flight work?”

“Yeah. What will I need?”

“That,” he pauses and points at my guitar case. Then he stands up, steps over to me, and puts a hand on my chest – over my heart. “And all that freakin' passion you've been saving up – in here.”

I stand up, he reaches out and shakes my hand.

“Southwest Airlines. Ticket will be at the counter.”

“Where am I going – so I can send some stuff out...”

“You'll see... And if you'll box it up, I'll prepay whatever it costs at FedEx. Just give them your name, my name and this account number.” He hands me a FedEx business card, with a number on it. “They'll know where it needs to end up. I'll have them hold it at the other end until you turn up to get it. Sound fair?”

Shaking my head, I smile at him and say, “I must be totally out of my mind... I swear to God...”

He gives me a huge grin, turns, and goes out the door.

I am about to find my way... a task that has eluded me for most of my adult life...

