

# Survive and Conquer

By thelump

Submitted: October 26, 2007

Updated: May 11, 2008

*Separately, four people are talented artists. But together they become miraculous. They revolutionize a country by merely existing.*

Provided by Fanart Central.

<http://www.fanart-central.net/stories/user/thelump/49381/Survive-and-Conquer>

<b>Chapter 0 - Plot Help</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Chapter 1 - I Perform for Questions (Keene)</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Chapter 2 - He Performs for Questions (Dove)</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Chapter 3 - The Second Performer (Drew)</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter 4 - The Second Invitation (Dove)</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Chapter 5 - Mud (Perkin)</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Chapter 6 - Meeting (Keene)</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Chapter 7 - Break your Heart (Drew)</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Chapter 8 - Sober (Scholar)</b>	<b>12</b>

## 0 - Plot Help

I understand that this story has the potential to be confusing since it is told through the eyes of 4 DIFFERENT people. I'm sorry. I just like to vary my Point of Views. I think it's interesting. But to clarify and organize the characters, I'm going to post the chapters in color.

Dark blue is the POV of the drummer, Drew.

Dark Red is the POV of the old blind violist, Keene.

Green will be a chapter by Perkin, the boy genius who plays flute.

And indigo will be the dancer, Dove.

Thank you for bearing with me folks. Ask me any other questions about my insane story, I'd be happy to try and help.

~Lumpy

## 1 - I Perform for Questions (Keene)

Cloth rustles and children chatter. I close my eyes, not to shut anything out, but to ease the muscles. I listen to the tensions, the rhythm of the audience. I smile as it ebbs into a question. "When will he start?"

Now.

The cherry wood viola slips under my chin and she begins. I play for minutes. I play for hours. If this ancient body could go without rest, I would play for years. I can feel my old man fingers creak as they shift. My wrist throbs with arthritis, but her music heals. Soon I won't feel anything but the vibrating life that is nestled into my neck. The viola is like a lover: soft, tender, curvaceous. She becomes a part of you. But when you finally detach, she leaves you breathless, sore, and yearning. Now my dark lady trembles under my exploring fingers. I finally stop when my hands slip, drenched in sweat.

But when the music dies away in a whisper-like echo...there is still a question hanging over me. The audience still asks a question? All of a sudden I feel very old. I groan and just barely have the energy to collect the coins I have earned. My unseeing eyes twitch and I press on my aching temples. Never have I performed and received a question in return. Even when I was young and I could read the faces I played for, never a question was asked when I stopped to bow. I turn to leave the artist platform as the next performer arrives.

## 2 - He Performs for Questions (Dove)

I watch the old man leave. I can see he is shaken. He is a strong soul, this traveling musician. But he does not know the things that I, Dove, know. He falters. He falters at the questions left behind. The people he performs for are hard. I know, for I was born among them.

The people of this country are strange. Foreigners call us cruel, corrupt, warped even. Like a mirror of glass gives a distorted image and taunts the face that gazes into it, my village twists the lives that stay here. The tainted people cheat. They lie, they steal, harm, murder, frighten. Men break the hearts of their women. Wives taunt the authority of their husbands. Daily, hundreds of citizens commit a myriad of crimes. It is impossible to know how many lives have been broken. How many womanly bodies hide bruises under their long skirts and rich silks. How many tears has that blond child standing on the corner cried? Is that yonder merchant really a truthful worker? Or does he swindle, gamble, cheat, and steal in order to buy his new secret love gaudy ankle bracelets? No doubt his blessed wife of many years saves him leftover onions and sausage on the cookstove each evening. But only before giving her children their bedtime beating and sneaking off to spend her night in a drunken disgrace.

Yet no one pays heed. They see the sick, twisted lives of their neighbors. They see their own revolting existence. And nothing is mentioned, nothing is changed. Normal, happy, fake lives are playacted each day. Conversation consists of the market prices, the weather, the recent entertainment in town. Oh--Despair does not creep through our country on cat feet. It drenches every living thing in its dark, inky stain. Soon we shall choke on it; little time is left before we drown in its liquid poison sea.

Aren't the prices of leeks this month atrocious? I do hope it will rain.

Deceit's thick, strong hands are quick to lunge for their pathetic, scrawny necks. Half of the miserable beings wish that their spines would snap. Some do take their lives into their own hands. Bodies are flung from rooftops, men fall on their swords, women nobly practice the death of Cleopatra as they imbibe cups full of death's ever present messenger: poison.

There is a new painter in town who came with the last caravan. Shall we go and watch him? Thursdays are such a bore.

And so every life is held on a short, painful, constricting chain. They hate it, but to escape is impossible. I watch their dark miserable eyes day after day. I cannot empathize, for my dance has saved me in a way. Despair I understand, Deceit I see in others. But the dance that has always led me has also kept me apart from the rest of the village. It illuminates the disgusting offal of this place. I dance to close myself...to purify anything in me. I dance to escape the pain of others. Their agony is beyond belief and it spills over onto me. So I sway into myself. I wish I could dance to the tune of the old man's viola. But I only applaud. I can hear the questions on the scattered clapping.

**Why?**

**How is the music so pure?**

**Why are the notes that come from the grandsire so saintly?**

**Why have we never heard such innocent music?**

**How?**

The questions jab at the straight retreating back of the blind musician. My own question escapes from

my tingling fingertips.

**Please my I dance with you?**

The intuitive violist stops mid-stride and turns his snowy head. His gray eyes do not know where I stand --but he nods once into the crowd. I will seek him out this night.

### 3 - The Second Performer (Drew)

I come to Apocsh every 7 weeks. I don't usually visit a village more than once or twice. But I have drummed on this artist platform five times. It is not because I like the village. I hate the squirming feeling I get down my spine when I enter its gates. Neither is it because my profit here is large. These merchants hardly pay the expected rate I could get at another town. Really, I have no reason to be here. I recoil as one of tonight's dancers sidles up against me. I twitch away from the smooth hips under her provocative costume, her feet tripping along to jangle her ankle bracelets, heavy black eyes that flutter and glance my way. This place disgusts me. I fling a nice glob of saliva into orbit. It lands mere centimeters from the girl's manicured toes, foamy in the sand. The Jezebel clicks her tongue and spins away amidst red and yellow silks. I guess she only likes handsome men with manners, picky picky. No matter, she will find a willing youth after her show.

My eye sweeps the artist platform. It is the same as any other platform in a neighboring village. It is wide-- long enough for a strong man to make eight, long, running strides. Like many performance platforms, it is painted black. On each side there are two torches and the front is illuminated by thick candles. Each candle has three wicks; they line the stage, each touching the one next to it. Tonight, as the old violist plays, it seems as if he were an ancient god fiddling in the stars. His beard and hoary head give him an air of wisdom. His dark red robes, his straight noble back, and his blank eyes give the old man an appearance of a statue in the temple ruins to the West. Placed on the jet black platform with each candle sending flickers over his venerable face, this musician sends out his celestial music like a godly messenger striking the hearts of his audience with passionate arrows. I like this elderly fellow. He knows how to play. He knows how to create. He deserves to play longer.

But now it is my turn. I sling my three drums over my shoulder and take one step onto the platform. The cymbals on my left ankle jangle sharply, and then die away into fairy-like tinkles. Like I have done six times before, I stop to stare into the crowd. I know that it makes them wary and uncomfortable, but I am looking for someone. My eyes flick back and forth and I clear my throat in discomfort. Sure, I look like a dimwit, but I can blame it on stage fright.

Finally, I catch sight of her. Suddenly embarrassed, I throw back my shoulders and stride to the center of the platform. I swing the drums down and set them carefully on the slick, black wood. I shuffle, scoot and arrange the trio--keeping rhythm and time as I do so.

Patter of fingers on the edge.

Tap. Ball and toe...the cymbals rattle for me.

Breeze before the storm.

I'm tempted to look up at the girl's face one last time before I launch myself into the flood of beats and rhythms. Instead, I reach back and pull a leather strap that holds my plait at the nape of my neck. The hair falls free for drumming. People say I am cold; a hard, unfeeling, unemotional rock. "Prideful pup." they scornfully sniff. Ha, but they have never seen me drum. With a slight smile on my face, I begin the thunder.

Rolling clouds jump under my palms.

My left foot scatters the lightning clashes.

I feel the strain down my back as every muscle in my body sends my fists flying.

I love this whirlwind. Somewhere between the downpour and the last echoing thunderclap, I look up to find her face. Indigo eyes under strawberry blond curls.

My hair sticks to my temples and drops of inspiration drip down my back. I grin. I love this firestorm.

I adore that little woman.

## 4 - The Second Invitation (Dove)

Wolf hair in his eyes, drums pulsing.

This man makes me want to dance.

He is the second one to do so tonight.



## 5 - Mud (Perkin)

My name is Perkin. I am only nine years old. But I still like lots of things. I like my flute, my pet cat. I like honey cinnamon bread, kickball, kremon fighting and horseback riding. But most of all I like my flute. My mam says I'm a child and I should act like a child. But I don't always feel like one. I think I am a flutist, not a child. Piping is my favorite thing anyway. Why would I do something else if I could be making flute music? Dove, the lady that does our Mam's laundry, says she thinks I'm the best musician ever. It's nice for her to say that. I'm pretty good, I think that she likes the traveling drummer more. He could make her dance if he wanted to. Dove only danced for me once.

It hadn't rained in forever and her garden was dry. (Dove loves flowers. And vegetables, but not because they taste good, but because they grow.) Now her plants were choking on the dusty air. But heavy clouds began to roll in and the hot day was swept away with clear cool air that prophesied thick, round raindrops. Dove stood outside for one full hour, just watching the black clouds; waiting for the storm to come. She whooped when the fat drops finally started to patter in the dust. I knew that she would dance if I could play something. So I reached into my room and snatched my flute from my bed. I played loud so she could hear over the roar of the water. Already soaked, Dove danced in her bare, wet feet. The dirt from the yard quickly turned to mud and streaked her legs. Wild hair whacked her neck and clung in dripping clumps from her cheeks. She wouldn't have looked very pretty if she had been standing still, or walking normally. I think she would have probably looked like a drowned cat. But while she danced she looked beautiful. Everything looked beautiful, even though she was covered in mud. I played in the beautiful mud all day. My mother said I must never do that again because grown ups never play in the mud. And if I wanted to play flute for Dove I had to become a grown up. That doesn't make sense, because Dove is a very grownup person, but she danced and played and dug and gardened in the beautiful mud too.

## 6 - Meeting (Keene)

We all met at midnight. I cannot tell you why. Perhaps it was pure coincidence. Or perhaps it was offspring of that great thing that stirs nations, governs hearts and provokes history. Either way, we came together. I still do not know if it was for good. The night was cold and the leftover performers and late night audience were sitting around fires, buying food and trinkets. My fingers were resting in the wooded bowl of berries cupped in my left arm. Suddenly young fingers touched my wrist. I was almost certain that these were music fingers.

"I play flute." Said a young voice. He said it simply, as if stating his name. He did not brag, he did not even think. Flute playing was simply something he did, just like breathing or blinking. I cleared my throat and popped another berry in my mouth.

"A flute player, hm? Can you pipe something for me?" I asked. His hand left my wrist and began to play. It was good. The tune lilted like shadows from a fire, and it tasted like berries. But it stopped at the sound of a woman's voice.

"Per-Kin!" It came with a swish of skirts. Suddenly, my questioner stood before me, and I knew she still asked it.

"Do you seek something, daughter?" I asked. After a pause...

"I'll return. One moment, grandsire." she replied. She turned and left quickly, like a stream flicking over pebbles.

"That's Dove, she has gone to get the drummer; she likes him. She likes you too, and so do I." The boy's voice was kind, happy and to the point. He didn't brag or praise for any reason. Everything he said was fact. I smiled at the comforting simplicity he used.

"Ahhhh" I sighed, and then laughed. "I am glad to be liked. Eat these, my flautist. I go to fetch wooden Lydia." I handed him the bowl of berries. "And Perkin?" I heard him swallow. "I like you as well. Will you play with me?" The boy did not answer for 4 long seconds. "Yes, of course." He finally answered. I smiled and turned into the dark. Young musicians, they had spunk. But me and my beauty, we had such a long friendship; that was something youngsters couldn't give a claim to. I stepped up onto the platform to find her.

## 7 - Break your Heart (Drew)

She touched my arm at midnight with her soft fingers. She swallowed once before speaking, the little hollow in her throat fluttering.

"Could you come?" her voice... "I would like you to play with the violist." And then I could say what I had been wanting to say for ever so long.

"Yes, of course. I and my drums are yours."

She gave a beautiful smile. "Thank you."

I scuffed my sandaled feet and stood, beating away the dust on my tunic. But instead of leading me to the old man's fire, she turned to the platform. In the middle of the black stage sat a small brown boy. His hair, eyes, skin and clothes were all the color of desert dust, but in his hands he held a bright red flute. Red as strawberries, wine, blood or poppies. Cherries or rubies. He raised this tomato flute to his lips and gave a trill when he spotted us. As if called, the old violist stepped onto the platform as well. At that moment we were together for the first time.

"Welcome," said the elderly man. "Shall we play?"

"Yes," replied the brown boy with the red flute. So I placed my drums and gave a beat. It was simplistic, easy, and a little wary. I did not know why we were playing together for no audience. But when I saw the girl tap a heel, I understood. This was just what we did. The viola quivered a deep weaving thread that twisted into the drums. I thought it was the only music I had ever heard. It was beyond beautiful, deeper than wild. Nothing could surpass it, until the lobster red flute came in. It added everything. Suddenly, our music opened doors, revolutionized, changed, transformed everything it touched. It was the most cleansing music I had ever heard. It would break your heart.

So I let the pulse intensify. Just to make the girl's skirt flow faster, to see the boy's fingers flicker over the red metal, to see the viola's strings tremble as the grandsire matched his chords. I had always understood that music did something to the soul, but this was supernatural.

## 8 - Sober (Scholar)

I think I must have been drunk. Ah, but there is a falsehood. I know I was drunk, inescapably intoxicated. But such was my life: a studious professor and scholar by day, a blundering, drunken cad by night. And what of it? There is none in my acquaintance who has not been thrown into delightful debauchery on a regular basis. There is no pleasure in a perfect life unless you can have an imperfect one to indulge in as a hobby.

But regardless, I was very drunk. I had no inclination as to where my shirt and shoes were. Perhaps I had gambled them away. I stood, if you could call my wavering stance standing, beneath one of the torches that brightened the performers' stage. Not many remain there after the entertainment ends, but I was too drunk and had become cocky enough to believe myself appealing to the many dancers that enchanted the crowd night after night. I reeled unsteadily, conscious of people on the black stage, but uncaring. The only one I really noticed was the lone woman. She was not in the costume or garb of a dancer- but she moved like she could fly. As if she could fly better than a swallow. Even in my slow stupor I was struck by her apparent grace and fluid movement.

A thick drum beat made me jump and I cursed as I lost my footing, landing heavily on my hip. The drums continued on keeping time with the beat in my temple. God, my head ached. My attempts to rise again were interrupted by a string of notes from some other instrument. It was beautiful, but annoying. I was drunk and everything that made me think was annoying. This enchanting music made me think, but I tried to push it back in order to prop myself up again. I concentrated on planting my feet as firmly as I could on the ground and then pulling myself up by the pole of the torch. My head swirled with the dust, the music, and the alcohol. I cursed again. Another sound wrapped itself in my head, or in the music, I couldn't differentiate the two. This new sound made me raise my head. In the center of the stage danced the girl that could fly. At least, I'm almost positive she was dancing, but I had never seen, heard, or felt anything like that one moment. I am not sure what happened. The unearthly music, the dancing girl - together it flew to my head and knocked something loose. In less than a moment I was sober. As a sober as sober can get. I saw myself. I saw my bare dirty chest and feet and I was repulsed by it. Whatever it was. I turned and retched. My body had experienced something unhuman and it shuddered and quivered in its rapid attempt to rid itself of that sick, twisted part of myself. It recoiled at its very being because it could not match up to the beauty before it.

I raised my head once more. Because, although the supernatural tearing of my soul had wounded me beyond anything I had ever know, although it had rent me into two and I was raw with newborn separation, it was the most gorgeous, glorious feeling that has existence. At that moment in time, I doubted heaven. Nothing could become better than this performance, it was higher than perfection, better than holy. It was after this revelation that I felt my limbs go weak - this time not from intoxication, but from pure pain of the beauty all around me. I fell to the ground and drifted off into an intense black sleep.