

Candidate C evidence

(Creative)

In the Jaws of the Grand Dragon

Mrs Mackenzie's living room was the lair of a black dragon. The piano; an uncontrollable beast that humiliated all who dared to cross its path. Yet week after week, I would journey into its cave, sit before its gaping mouth, place my fingers on its daunting black and white teeth and wait for the torture to begin - my piano lesson.

For any other kid, Friday afternoons signified the weekend, a chance to sit back and relax after a tiresome week. Freedom from school. The night where you can unwind and forget about maths equations, English essays and French grammar. Every other kid got to go home, relax and enjoy their stress-free night. But not me. From the time I was 9 until I was 15, I absolutely detested Friday after school. Of course back then, it was not called Friday for me but rather "Piano Day".

Every Piano Day, I reluctantly stepped off the bus and into the car, tears welling up in my eyes. Hungry for Friday night pizza, my stomach rumbled as Mum drove me to Mrs Mackenzie's house. Every second that passed in the car took me closer to the doom I knew awaited me. As Mum pulled up to the grey-brick house, I appreciated my last seconds of freedom. I took a deep breath and dragged myself towards the front of the house. As I reached the front door, my shaking hand lifted slowly and pushed the cold door bell. The melancholy sound of the bell rang through the cavernous hall and I waited to be escorted in. As I stood in the cold, thoughts flew through my head. Had I done enough practice the past week? Would I come out crying, again? Maybe I would get lucky and she would be out. But every time without fail and to my utter dismay, I heard the dreaded creak of her footsteps and saw the dark shadow looming up towards me.

Mrs Mackenzie always wore an old fashioned blue dress that draped to just below her knees, and a knitted brown cardigan. Her hair was short and matched the colour of the grey-bricks of her house. Her glasses sat on top of her pointy nose as she looked down upon me in a disapproving manner. Her small, wizened body perfectly matched her stern, traditional personality.

Painfully slowly, she opened the door, her arm outstretched in a wordless sign of greeting. She bared her yellow teeth in what I assumed to be a smile as I stepped into the gloom of her hallway. I was ushered into the spent air of her sitting room. The same ancient lamp gave just enough light onto the old upright piano that stood glaring at me from the opposite wall. If I was lucky, the piano was still torturing the previous victim. I hung my blazer on one of the chairs and sat down, waiting for my turn. In front of me sat piles of colouring books, half completed crosswords and a box of dried out felt-tip pens. I had little interest in finishing one of the crosswords, and it wouldn't have mattered even if I had as the pupil before me stood up, stifled a deep sigh of relief under the glare of Mrs Mackenzie and cast me a knowing smile. With very little conversation, she vacated the piano stool, snatched her coat and left the room as quickly as possible. I barely had time to get out my music pieces before the sound of the front door slamming echoed through the halls and soon returned Mrs Mackenzie. Now it was just me, her, and the menacing piano. Each lesson began with a throat-clearing sound that I roughly translated into "take your seat".

Perched on the piano stool, my voice trembled as I unsuccessfully tried to waste time, asking about her plans for the weekend. Her blunt replies led quickly on to the end of

our conversation and she began asking for the dreaded scales and arpeggios that I had supposedly practised. My eyes were fixated on the notes, not daring to look anywhere else. Half guessing, I placed my fingers on the cold keys and attempted numerous 'memorised' scales. From time to time I would either get a "good" or a disapproving shake of her head. I checked the clock that hung above the piano, but the hands were making painfully slow progress.

On occasion, Mrs Mackenzie would dab the end of her nose with a scrunched up tissue which would then disappear up the sleeve of her cardigan. Now it was time to move onto the endlessly rehearsed Grade 4 piece, "A Prelude in C". I had practised the piece so many times that I was getting sick of hearing it and yet it was never enough for her. Her pencil struck repetitively against the wood of the piano to keep me in check with the time signature. Her beady eyes glared over her thin glasses as she watched my uncoordinated hands reach for the keys. Her jaw was clenching and unclenching as she stopped me for the umpteenth time, picking up on every small mistake, making me repeat the same agonizing passage until I got it just right.

I began to panic as the unfamiliar part of the piece loomed up on me. As I threw my fingers wildly at the keys, she raised her head, looked to the ceiling and sighed. In her icy voice, she abruptly told me I was "just guessing" and muttered something under her breath which was impossible to distinguish. Growing impatient, she nudged me off the chair to show me how it was done. Embarrassed, my heart sank and I willingly stood up. Her curled old fingers glided effortlessly over the keys, putting all my work to shame. Jealous of her natural talent, I watched in awe. This was how the melody was supposed to sound, yet I couldn't perfect it. She grinned proudly and reluctantly moved back to her own crooked chair. I sat down ashamed, not willing to place my hands anywhere near the piano.

As I splayed my fingers and once again returned them to the cold ivory I prayed that I wouldn't mess up this time. She pointed to the middle of the bar and ordered me to begin from there. Immediately, I began to play and managed to successfully get through the rest of the piece with surprisingly little amount of further interruption. When I eventually reached the end, she nodded generously. To my delight the melancholy bell rang through my ears, indicating the next poor pupil to endure their thirty minutes of suffering. Just before exiting the room to answer the door, she announced I was ready to sit my Grade 4 exam and my name was going forward. Wanting to scream "NO!"; I politely nodded and followed her through the dark corridors to her front door. As she welcomed the next young girl in, I thanked her for my awful lesson and bared my teeth in a forced grin. As she slammed the door behind me the smile dropped off my face and I found myself back in the freezing cold.

As I got into the warm car, Mum gave me a welcoming smile. We drove away in silence until she dared to ask how it went; "Fine... she's putting me forward for my grade 4". Mum smirked and asked if I was ready to sit the piano exam. In all truth, I was never ready to sit my grade 4; at that moment all I was ready for was some pizza. Despite this, lurking already in the back of my mind were thoughts of next week's piano lesson in the lair of the black dragon.

Word Count- 1,299