Spotlight

 The closer I got to the stage, the more my heart felt as if it would burst through the white blouse I wore. Trying to keep my composure was harder than trying not to laugh at my three year old sister name calling from the audience. One more glance back reminded me that my whole family filled the front row with no regrets, meaning there was only one thing left to do: make them proud.

 As I approached the mc that introduced me to the stage, I felt a bit nauseous. His obnoxious parading and yelling did not seem to excite me the way it did the audience, so I stood aside and waited. After a short moment of what seemed to be years, all eyes were on me. *What was I doing up here?* I pondered as I tried silently rehearsing the way I would begin the tune. After all, I did need a bit more rehearsal, and I could have used a few practice crowds before this. My palms began to feel like my niece’s baby wipes, and for a quick second I had wished they were. (Maybe then I could leave this place, after all I did not mind changing a diaper instead.) The hair on the back of my neck almost stood taller than I, and a slight breeze could be captured if you stood in the right spot. I was terrified.

 With the microphone now in my hand, the nerves in my knee began dancing before I could tell them to. My steady grip turned into the hand of a tambourine player, and the only way to get the shaking to stop, was to sing. --Sing like no one was there, like I had done this a thousand times.

 I scanned the room once more, trying not to let the anticipation of the audience steer me the wrong way. Big eyes gazed up and down as I stood there wordless, and I began scanning. I spotted my oldest sister in the audience, the one that had the tendency to brag about my singing more than she would about her college grade point average.

 “Are you ever gonna’ sing for anybody?” she would ask, trying to sound intimidating.

 I began thinking of the way my life was before this, the life that I had lived while grasping a talent that was unknown to the world. That life is about to be over, I thought to myself. As I raised the microphone and took a deep breath, she smiled silently as if she felt that I was ready. This was it, I thought to myself, this was my chance.

 The first line of my acappella was enough to get the crowd’s attention. My vibrato was nice and sweet, words as crisp as unspent money. I sang softly and precisely in the beginning, grooving slowly and carefully not to misguide my serenade. As I climbed the notes and got comfortable, I could feel my presence evolving with the song I sang, growing broader with each syllable. Soon I was narrating Alicia Keys’s ballad as if I were telling a story of my own. Hand movements turned into facial expressions that enabled a sound so unforgettable and true. The encouragement from the voices that sang along was the fuel to my ongoing flight, a flight that had finally took off for me. With little turbulence, I was there. I was in my *little land of music*, the place I had never shared with an audience, not including my sister. Voices of encouragement and passionate movement filled the room now, and when the bridge was done, I felt complete. I had never experienced something so overwhelming which now consumed me, something so fulfilling and raw.

 As I returned the microphone and exited the stage, I felt so relieved, yet wanted to do it all over again! Conquering my fear turned out to be more powerful than fear itself, and at age eleven, I was truly amazed at what I had just done. My little brothers and sisters surrounded me with pride, trying to cover up smiling teeth. This is what I had been missing out on: Putting smiles on faces, making people feel good. At times I was so concerned about everyone else’s opinions, I forgot to make my own. Nevertheless, those same opinions were the validation of my pride, and I could not feel any better inside. This night was full of amazement, and it was this very night that my life changed. I felt like a star on that stage, a star that had just been born with a natural light. This night was warm, even when cold, with excitement. It was this night, of all nights, that reassured me that I could live like this forever, with no regrets.