

MUTED

TAMI CHARLES

SCHOLASTIC INC.

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AIRPORT LINES

are the worst—
'specially during holidays.
But that's not the case for us,
right, Captain Lafleur?

We hustle past the bustle,
sight unseen,
straight to the holding room,
where we'll wait . . . and wait some more,
before being escorted to the plane . . . first.

Pilot perks.
Also: *boss moves!*

This leaves plenty of time
—one hour, forty-four minutes—
for me to explain how it all went down.
I'm gonna say some stuff
you ain't gonna like.
But you've done some stuff
I didn't like either.
So maybe you'll get it.

And I'm sorry, Papi.
For lying. For leaving.
But not for the music.

Even though it took some time
to open my eyes,
I fixed everything, you'll see.
I muted the monster once and for all.

And now . . .
I get to go home.
With you.
Just like you, and Gwen,
and Ma wanted.

But first, I gotta start
from the beginning.

SATURDAY, MAY 11

Inside the great white tent
in the community center parking lot,
an emcee tapped and screeched
into the microphone . . .

“Singing India Arie’s
‘Beautiful Surprise,’
give it up for our next
Corn Festival talent finalists . . .
Angelic Voices!”

Slow claps simmered
from the small audience
as three brown girls
took their place in the spotlight.

Fingers plucked F#m chords
three voices, three harmonies
powered through verse and chorus,
as onlookers looked on,
and over,
and *at*
anything else
but the magic unfolding on the stage.

It wasn’t the first time
we sang and dreamed
and wished upon a star,
every wish, every prayer unanswered.

But for me,
I longed for the day
when hustle
turned to gold.
Show it to my family.
Show them who I really am.

That night, as we celebrated our win
—fifty bucks and a bushel of corn—
three amigas lay on a blanket
in the grassy meadow of Shohola Falls.

“We *rich* rich now, y’all!”
I fanned my sweaty face
with my cut . . . a whole seventeen dollars.

“Even Black Jesus knows
that ain’t enough to do enough.”
Shak half laughed, half groaned.

And she and I high-fived
our measly-ass thirty-four dollars
beneath a silver moon.

“I’m so done with
this small-time mierda,”
Dali cursed at the blue-gray skies.
“We need a stroke of luck.
Like . . . if y’all could sing for anyone
in the universe, who would it be?”

“Kirk Franklin.” Shak didn’t hesitate.

“Queen Yeli, J. Lo, but most of all . . .”

Dali and I locked eyes and belted
“Sean ‘Mercury’ Ellis!!!” in perfect harmony.
We’d been stanning homeboy since third grade.

“The King of R&B?
Wouldn’t that be something?” Shak smiled.

And on that night,
three brown girls,
three heartbeats colliding,
laughed and laughed
at that dumbass dream.

But as the sky grew darker,
the stars undressed themselves,
and the universe whispered ever-so-softly,

*Some wishes are granted
only to the bold . . .*