

Solo

by Roland Foster

I caught Michael outside the church office. "Michael. Got a minute?"

"Sure, Kevin. Come with me while I make a few copies."

I followed him inside. "Breaking the copyright laws one more time, I see."

Michael sighed. "Story of my life. We spend a fortune on sheet music, and I always have to copy something. What's on your mind?" He started making copies.

"I was wondering if I — uh — if I could maybe do the Messiah solo tonight."

"Nope. Henry's doing that. You're doing the solo on the Beck piece."

"Yeah, I know, but there's this Doctor Albert Ulrich — "

"From the King's College? Where you're hoping to get a scholarship?"

"Right. Anyway, he's gonna be here tonight — "

"Oh, really?"

" — but only for the first half of the concert."

"How do you know?"

"I heard Sally and Teresa talking about it."

"Well, I'm sorry, Kevin, but the answer is no."

"Why can't I do it instead of Henry? I know it cold, I've practiced it hundreds of times. It's perfect for my voice. It would be so great if Dr. Ulrich could hear me sing it."

Michael gave me a look. "I know you're only sixteen," he said, "But I thought you were more grown up than that."

"That's not an answer."

"Look. There are a dozen reasons why not. The main one is that it's Henry's solo, and I won't take it away from him. He's worked hard on it and he does it well. Also, we rehearsed it with him doing the solo, not with you. And we don't make last minute changes before a concert unless we absolutely have to, and we don't have to this time."

"What if I decide I don't want to do the Beck solo?"

This time he really gave me a look. "You can't blackmail me, Kevin. Don't try it, or you can walk out and not come back. Don't think you're indispensable. You're not."

"Yeah, you're right. I'm sorry I said that."

"I'm glad I didn't hear it. Now let me finish this. It's almost time to warm up."

"But, jeez — Could we at least switch the two pieces so Dr. Ulrich could hear me do the Beck?"

"We could, if we had a good enough reason. But I don't think we have."

"But, Michael — "

"You know, Kevin, I'm disappointed in you. You have a good voice. With training and a lot of hard work, someday it will be a very fine voice. Where did you get your voice?"

"Huh? What do you mean? I was born with it."

"Right. It's a gift. God gave it to you. Don't you think He has plans for you? Can't He provide opportunities for scholarships?"

"I guess I thought this was one of those opportunities."

"Not the way you're going about it. There's no room for selfishness in God's plans. I hope you remember that."

I held his gaze for a moment, then turned away. "Okay," I said. "Thanks."

"On the other hand, Kevin — " I turned back toward Michael. "It wouldn't surprise me if Dr. Ulrich came early to hear us warm up."

"Oh, man!. You mean it?"

"Yes." Michael smiled. "So sing well. But, Kevin — "

"What?"

"Remember what Bach said about his music."

"*'Soli Deo Gloria.'* I won't forget. Thanks, Michael."