

"The Healing Harps"

a SciFi/Drama short film
by

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FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY

Hospital sounds merge with harp music. Elevator doors open. GROVER stomps out with a small harp. He's 28, cavalier in a white turtleneck, cherub hair, nose broken a few times.

BARRY'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Grover plucks a feathery tune at bedside. Nurse FLO - 31, gracefully weathered - removes bandages from BARRY's burly back. The song ends with a rock-n-roll riff. Barry grins.

BARRY

Man, you ROCK! The EMTs would love you down at the house.

GROVER

You can learn to play, too.

BARRY

Yeah, but you're really good. I mean it. You should play concerts.

GROVER

If I only had the time.

Barry shakes his hand. Grover winces and twists free.

BARRY

Wow. Your hand is on fire.

GROVER

I hope you have a speedy recovery. I'll see you later, Flo.

FLO

Thank you Grover, that was lovely. Let's see that shoulder now, Barry.

Flo and Grover share a smirk. She removes Barry's dressing: only first-degree burns; they should be much worse.

BARRY

(chuckle)
That tickles.

INT. GROVER'S APT - NIGHT

Grover sits over his harp. Gritting his teeth, he carefully removes his shirt. His shoulder is blistered with second-degree burns.

He plucks a fiery tune. As the burns fade to pink skin, the music segues to rain-like plucking. He stretches, then hangs over the harp, spent.

INT. HOSPITAL CAFETERIA - NEXT DAY

Grover studies sheet music. Flo startles him with a spit-wad.

FLO
Hey, harp man.

GROVER
Hey Flo. How's the slugger?

FLO
Tommy's doing good... great, actually. The neurologist doesn't have a clue why, though.

GROVER
Doctors can't explain everything.

FLO
(skeptical)
His... his beta's are getting stronger. His attention span's better. And his motor skills--

GROVER
He'll be a short-stop in no time.

FLO
I don't know about that. His dad wasn't the most coordinated guy.
(she drifts a second)
I think your piano lessons might have something to do with it.

GROVER
Oh! By the way. Can we make it Thursday?

FLO
Yeah, sure.

He packs the sheet music into his harp bag.

FLO (cont'd)
What do you have there?

GROVER
It's Greensleeves for Mrs.
Kouglemeyer on six-east.

FLO
Oh. The "death" floor.

GROVER
(distant)
Did you know that she played for
the Philharmonic? Gave it up for
motherhood. Three kids. No regrets.

Flo ponders him as he dons his white gloves.

FLO
Don't mess-up those pretty hands.
See you later, tater.

GROVER
Thursday!

MRS. KOUGLEMEYER'S ROOM - LATER

MARGARET KOUGLEMEYER weeps to GROVER's harping Greensleeves.
SUSAN observes from the doorway. She is the harp supervisor -
50s, flowing silver hair, eye-patch.

MARGARET
That song moves me so much. It's
like returning to another life.

GROVER
Some of us live many lives,
Margaret.

MARGARET
You're my angel.

SUSAN
That was beautiful, Grover.

He's startled. Susan comes between them--

SUSAN (cont'd)
How are you feeling today, Mrs.
Kouglemeyer?

MARGARET

Getting... much better.

Margaret grimaces bravely as she sits up. Her upper chest becomes exposed: dark-crusted scabs.

MARGARET (cont'd)

When I get home, I'm making my famous pasta-e-fagioli for everyone. You're all my angels.

GROVER

We look forward to it, Mrs. Kouglemeyer.

Susan applies ointment to Margaret's chest-scabs as Grover slinks out.

SUSAN

Grover. Could you stop by the office today before you leave?

SUSAN'S OFFICE - LATER

Grover sits small among harp-relics, and photographs that pan-out like historical documents. An old photo looks like Susan.

Susan tunes a Gothic harp; big, beautiful, ominous.

SUSAN

I think I enjoy tuning more than I do playing. [BEAT] How are you feeling today, Grover?

GROVER

Fit as a fiddle, thanks.

She eyeballs him, then floats to the window.

GROVER (cont'd)

I just had some things to take care of yesterday. I'm fine. Thanks.

SUSAN

You've heard of the Chalice of Repose, haven't you?

GROVER

[BEAT] Yes. They do bedside vigils.

SUSAN

There are three kinds of vigil:
months, days, or hours to live. The
closer to their time, the more
important it is to ease them into a
peaceful, conscious death. Timing
is of the utmost importance.

GROVER

That sounds so final. What about--

SUSAN

These are not your patients,
Grover. You are not a healer.
You're here to--

GROVER

--Soothe, I know. But we're more
than just band-aids. There's
documented research--

SUSAN

--I'm concerned about your empathy--

GROVER

--Don't worry about me, I'm fine--

SUSAN

It's not you I'm concerned with.
[BEAT] I don't want you playing on
six-east anymore.

He sinks into the chair.

SUSAN (cont'd)

Someday, I'll tell you a story,
before you learn it for yourself.

She hands him his little white harp.

GROVER

So where am I now?

FOYER - NEXT DAY

GROVER sits on a fold-out chair by the elevator. He plays a
melancholy tune. A middle-aged COUPLE whisper into the
elevator--

HUSBAND

What is that boy doing there?

WIFE

I don't know. Maybe he's homeless.

The elevator doors close. Grover twang's a string.

INT. GROVER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Grover rummages through sheet music at the piano. A page spills out. It's a yellowed, hand-written composition. He puts it aside and searches for another.

INT. FLO'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Grover tutors piano to ten-year-old TOMMY, who wears a baseball cap and a mouthpiece around his neck. His fingers twitch over the piano keys. Grover points to sheet music--

GROVER

What's this one called?

Tommy searches. Flo peeks-in from another room.

GROVER (cont'd)

Remember the animals?

TOMMY/GROVER

C I'm Candy the cat, Candy Cat; D I'm Donald the Dog, Donald Dog; E I'm Elmer the Elephant; F I'm Fanny the Frog -- Fanny, Fanny, Fanny; G I'm Gerald Giraffe, don't laugh; A I'm Andy the Ant; B I'm Billy the Bee, that's me; and C I'm Co-py Cat, Copy Cat.

GROVER

Now you play them, one at a time.

TOMMY

Did your mom make you play piano?

GROVER

I didn't really have a mom. She went away when I was a kid.

TOMMY

Why did she go away?

Tommy's playing steadies--

GROVER
I really don't know.

TOMMY
Do you think she'll come back?

GROVER
I don't think so, kid.

Grover's left hand trembles--

TOMMY
My mom likes it when I play.

GROVER
It works even better when you like.

Grover's hand jitters. They hit random keys and hash-out the baseball "rally-charge" song. Flo smirks.

LIVING ROOM - LATER

Two glasses of wine sit on a coffee table. Grover peruses photographs on the wall: a family picnic; Tommy with baseball and mitt; Flo, Tommy and Danny, the father.

Flo hushes out of Tommy's bedroom.

FLO
He goes out-like-a-light after lessons.

GROVER
I must confess. I have a secret.

FLO
Please tell me.

GROVER
Most kids don't like lessons. So I match their mood musically, then progress to a mellow tune--

FLO
You devil.

GROVER
It's called music entrainment.

They both reach for wine. He notices bite marks on her hand.

GROVER (cont'd)
We do it all the time at the hospital.

FLO
That reminds me. Remember that fireman, Barry?

GROVER
Fireman?.. Yes, I think so--

FLO
He's being released tomorrow. It's weird. He should be in for at least another week.

GROVER
Good for him.

FLO
Maybe you had something to do with it?

GROVER
Well, it is called Healing Harps
[BIG BEAT]

FLO/GROVER
Let's get some more wine.

DOORWAY - LATER

They stand nervously at the threshold--

FLO
You're really good with him.

GROVER
He's a great kid. He won't be playing Mozart, but--

FLO
He likes hanging with you. I guess it sort of fills-in the void... since Danny passed--

He takes her hand, caresses the bite marks--

FLO (cont'd)
When he gets fits, I have to put that damn mouthpiece in. Not an easy task, I'll tell you--

(MORE)

FLO (cont'd)
 (relaxed now)
 I know we want to keep this...
 professional-- wow... your hands
 are so warm--

His eyes flutter. She giggles, twists her hand free.

FLO (cont'd)
 --maybe we could have dinner or
 something... you and me.

GROVER
 That sounds nice.

She floats inside, closing the door.

GROVER (cont'd)
 I'll see you later... tater.

Grover lingers a bit. The porch-light turns off. He puts his gloves on, and winces at his hand.

BATHROOM - LATER

Flo washes-up and dries her hands. She notices that the bite-marks have vanished. She's puzzled.

INT. HOSPITAL GIFT SHOP - DAY

Grover plays ambient music on a fold-up chair, with a bite-marked hand. The HUSBAND from the elevator shuffles in.

TELLER
 How is everything today?

HUSBAND
 Touch-and-go. What can you do?

Grover segues into an frollicking tune. The Husband grabs a bouquet of flowers.

TELLER
 Will that be all?

HUSBAND
 I think so.

He drops his change into a charity canister.

MRS. KOUGLEMEYER'S ROOM - LATER

Grover sneaks-in with flowers, harp under his arm. The room is empty. The flowers sink in his hand.

NURSES' STATION - CONTINUOUS

A vacuous YOUNG NURSE chats on the telephone.

YOUNG NURSE

--I saw her at McKool's, wearing that trampy mini-skirt, dancing with every guy except Jimmy.

Grover rustles his flowers. She gives a "just-a-minute" look.

NURSE

I don't know. Maybe it's been a while, you know what I mean?

He taps his fingers. She puckers her lips.

NURSE (cont'd)

I'll call you back. I got to go.
(to Grover)
Aren't you one of those harpies?

GROVER

Bedside harpist, actually. Could you tell me--

NURSE

You guys are creepy. Like angels or something, roaming around--

GROVER

Where is Mrs. Kouglemeyer? The patient in 610?

NURSE

(checking the roster)
She's in hospice now.

GROVER

What room?

NURSE

I can't give you that information, unless you are family, or have written authorization.

He raises his harp.

GROVER

Mrs. Margaret Kouglemeyer asked for a bedside vigil, if things ever got bad. I don't fill-out forms. And we don't have much time left.

NURSE

Okay. Do I have to call that woman first... Sue-Ellen?

GROVER

Not at all.

NURSE

Good. She gives me the creeps.

HOSPICE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Grover sits bedside to Margaret. She's unconscious, as morphine drips a steady beat--

Her chest barely moves as his harp-dirge begins. Her breathing matches the music as he plays upwardly. She shrieks awake and writhes in agony as his hands fall upon her chest.

CUT TO: BLACK, THEN FADE IN:

Susan rolls-in her Gothic harp, Margaret in peaceful repose. Susan checks her pulse [BEAT] then hums a lament. A harp string pops--

RECOVERY ROOM - EIGHT DAYS LATER

A scruffy-faced Grover lies in bed, baseball cap beside him. His hand twitches it off. He sits-up, confused.

INT. FLO'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Tommy plays piano, trembles and grabs his mouth piece. Flo swoops in and takes him to the couch. She cradles him as he calms, and gives him a sip of water.

TOMMY

Did you hear from Grover yet?

FLO
 Let's get you ready for bed. I'll
 be in, in a minute.

He shuffles-off. She almost drops the glass when she sees Grover outside the window. He tips a Baseball cap.

DOORWAY

She gapes at him in his hospital gown. He holds out Tommy's Baseball cap. She snatches it--

FLO
 (harsh whisper)
 Eight days, Grover. The doctors had
 no idea what to do. You'd grow
 tumors, then they'd disappear. Your
 arms would blister, the next day
 they're scars. You were having--

--a quick look over her shoulder--

FLO (cont'd)
 --you were having seizures--

GROVER
 How is Tommy?

She snarls, then displays her hand--

FLO
 What did you do? How--

GROVER
 I took it away.

She grimaces at his bite-marked hand--

FLO
 This isn't real. What are you, some
 kind of magician? Masochist? Do you
 get off on suffering? On other
 peoples' suffering?

GROVER
 I just want to help--

FLO
 Apparently your help is temporary.

She deliberates. Hands him a jacket.

FLO (cont'd)
 I can't see you now. [BEAT] Go.
 Before I change my mind.

She closes the door and watches him through the window as he shuffles off, jacket-less.

EXT. GROVER'S APARTMENT - LATER

Grover can't open the door; no keys.

FIRE ESCAPE

He finds the window open. A piano plays mischievously within. He hesitates, then enters.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A dimly-lit FIGURE plays piano. The mood slows and tickles. Grover turns the light up. It's Susan, her once-covered eye, a cloudy marble. She stops.

SUSAN
 Maybe you'll finally finish this?

GROVER
 What are you doing here?

SUSAN
 What are you doing?

She rises to the window where a dying plant hangs--

SUSAN (cont'd)
 I think it's time told you that story now.

Grover sits at the piano.

SUSAN (cont'd)
 There once was a young farmer and his wife, a fiddle player. One day, the farmer became ill. None of the medics could cure him.

She turns from the plant; it shows signs of life.

SUSAN (cont'd)
 That's when she discovered her "spacial" talent;
 (MORE)

SUSAN (cont'd)
 she was able to take on his
 sickness, and pass it away with
 music.

Grover plays a fragile piano.

FLASHBACK - GROVER'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - NIGHT

A dreamy song plays. Ten-year-old Grover awakens, coughing at the strange-smelling air.

SUSAN (V.O.)
 But her husband had one relapse
 after another, each one worse than
 the previous.

KITCHEN

Fumes mist-in from under a closed door. He turns the knob.

SUSAN (V.O.)
 He came to depend on her healing
 music so much, she lost herself in
 his suffering.

GARAGE - INSIDE CAR

Exhaust fumes. MOTHER with eyes closed. Grover puzzles at the opened door. He tries to wake her. Ejects a cassette tape from the stereo, labeled Grover's Songs--

SUSAN
 The constant struggle for life,
 from death became a great strain,
 too great for either to bear.

He takes Mom's face, eyes rolling back as her's flitter open.

SUSAN (V.O.) (cont'd)
 They suffered together in vain, and
 their farm wilted with them. All
 they wanted now--

Mom grimaces in horror. He falls back onto the garage floor.

SUSAN (V.O.) (cont'd)
 --was to pass-on peacefully.

Mom's eyes close as Grover crawls out of the garage.

END FLASHBACK

Grover plays a lament, pauses, then wells-up decidedly, crescendos aggressively.

GROVER

All we wanted was for her to be
happy... to get her out of it. I
almost did, but I was too small

SUSAN

It wasn't your's to heal. [BEAT] If
you want to live your own life,
then let go of her's... now--

A piano string breaks. He passes out to dissonant chords.

SUNRISE

He awakes on the couch, disheveled, yet glowing. His harp sits beside an end-table with a mug of tea and new strings.

AT THE PIANO

He closes the key cover. Considers old sheet music.

WINDOW-SIDE

Outside, sheet music burns in a cooking pot. He sits on the window pane, tuning his harp. The spruced-up plant dangles above him. He tightens a string, smirking at vestigial teeth-marks on his hand.

FADE OUT.

THE END