

At Carnegie



“A-one, a-two, a-one two three *fo!*” chanted Neil as he launched into a stripped-down version of Franz Schubert’s Symphony #9, “the Great.” It was his one chance to impress the Carnegie Hall critics and he meant to make the most of it. True, he was technically on the street *outside* of the famous concert hall, but he wasn’t about to let a little technicality ruin his chance for stardom. It was also true that, at the moment, the only person watching him was Dan, the itinerant kung fu apprentice whose family had been whacked by ninjas. Still, Neil was grateful for *any* audience, and he tried hard to nail the high B flat that capped the first ritornello. He missed, as usual, but, undeterred, he played on. The second movement featured an extended panpipe cadenza, and he attacked it with gusto. Unfortunately, for the, like, umpteenth time, he’d forgotten to rinse off the mouthpiece after he last played it, and it reeked of last weekend’s tandoori chicken take-out. Or was it from the week before? He wanted to stop long enough to wipe off the vestiges of gizzard, but Dan was watching him closely, and Neil knew that the show, at all costs, must go on. Somehow, he found the resolve to disregard the vile taste and soldier on. But then an earwig crawled out of the instrument’s middle pipe. Neil recoiled in disgust. The recoiling action triggered a sudden intake of breath. And accompanying the breath into his lungs was, regrettably, the earwig. The horrid little insect instinctively began to swim the wrong way through Neil’s respiratory system towards his ear, where, according to a graphic Discovery Channel program, it would burrow into and commence eating his brain. Neil coughed, hard, and was rewarded with a tiny sliver of insectival wing on his tongue. A subsequent cough was so forceful that he had to set down his guitar to keep his balance. This action signified to Dan that the concert was over. And Dan was not pleased. The music helped him forget about the ninjas. The earwig, meanwhile, having lost both wings, half a mandible and an antenna, still struggled onward, until at last it reached its goal. Moments later, his forehead suddenly itching like crazy, Neil thought how much ol’ Franz Schubert had resembled a bug. And that, alas, was his *last* thought.