

Arachne's Web

What had seemed like a good idea two weeks ago was turning into one of the most stomach-churning experiences of Katie's life. She cautiously peeped through the heavy black curtains and then quickly yanked her head back into the backstage gloom. "She's out there," Katie breathed to Mila and Renee. "They're all out there."

"They," of course, were the five members of The Crystal Wolves, the greatest alt-rock band in the world. Lead guitarist and vocalist Eddie Kaye was arguably the most well-known band member, his dark, brooding eyes glowering on every magazine cover from *Rolling Stone* to *Time*, but he was nothing compared to Molly Lee, the band's bassist and only female. Katie parted the curtains again, marveling at the fact that THE Molly Lee, decked out in her signature braids and a surprisingly demure pair of tortoiseshell eyeglasses, was actually in Katie's hometown and, in a matter of moments, would watch Katie and the other members of Arachne's Web take the stage.

Just the thought of it made Katie want to throw up.

The Crystal Wolves were touring the Midwest, and they were looking for a local act to open for them at Knott's Amphitheater that evening. Katie, Mila, and Renee had practiced relentlessly over the past two weeks, leading to good-natured complaints from Mila's dad about "auditory trauma." Now he stood backstage with them, resting one hip on a secondhand amplifier and giving the evil eye to the other bands milling around the darkened wings of the theater.

Resisting the urge to puke, Katie slung her bass over her shoulder and silently ran through their song in her head, pressing her fingers to the appropriate strings and tapping her foot to the beat. There were four bands ahead of them. The third group's plodding dirge buoyed Katie's spirits, and a feeling of confidence settled into the base of her spine as the mediocre band ahead of them wound down. Heads up and shoulders back, Arachne's Web took the stage to a smattering of applause and a hearty shout from Mila's dad.

The performance was a blur of blinding stage lights and upbeat tempos. Before they knew it, Katie, Mila, and Renee were hustled into the wings by a gruff stage manager wearing a bulky headset. The trio huddled in a corner for an agonizing hour before the final votes were tallied.

They didn't win. A pop/punk band of hyperactive college sophomores claimed the crown and the opening slot for The Crystal Wolves. Katie tried to remain stoic as she gently placed her bass in its sturdy black case, but a fat tear escaped her brimming eyelids.

"You guys were rad," a cheerful voice said over her shoulder. Katie whirled around and was confronted with the smiling, bespectacled face of Molly Lee. "Do you have a demo tape? I think our manager would love to hear it."

Katie fought back the urge to tackle her musical hero with an exuberant hug but couldn't help grinning.
"Yeah, we do."

Questions

1. How did the author structure "Arachne's Web?"
2. Who is the narrator of this story? Use details from the text to explain your answer.
3. What is the theme or lesson of the story? Use details from the text to explain your answer.
4. The author chose to have the band fail to win the contest. Develop an argument either for or against this decision. In your answer, explain how the theme of the story would be different if the author had made a different decision.

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. yanked
2. brooding
3. glowering
4. demure
5. relentlessly
6. trauma
7. milling
8. dirge
9. stoic
10. exuberant

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) "quickly **yanked** her head back"

- a. hit or banged b. covered; concealed c. jerked; snapped d. tied or secured

2) "his dark, **brooding** eyes glowering on every magazine cover"

- a. showing deep thought; serious b. dark brown c. half closed; squinting d. handsome

3) "his dark, brooding eyes **glowering** on every magazine cover"

- a. shining; glimmering b. winking c. weeping; crying d. scowling or frowning

4) "a surprisingly **demure** pair of tortoiseshell eyeglasses"

- a. modest or prim b. fashionable c. expensive d. cheap; inexpensive

5) "Katie, Mila, and Renee had practiced **relentlessly** over the past two weeks"

- a. silently; quietly b. continuously; constantly c. nervously d. occasionally

6) "Katie, Mila, and Renee had practiced relentlessly over the past two weeks, leading to good-natured complaints from Mila's dad about 'auditory **trauma**.'"

- a. repair b. padding; insulation c. earphones d. damage; injury

7) "the other bands **milling** around the darkened wings of the theater"

- a. practicing b. hiding; avoiding discovery c. moving aimlessly; wandering d. sitting

8) "The third group's plodding **dirge**"

- a. slow, sad song; lament b. movements c. drum set; percussion d. plans

9) "Katie tried to remain **stoic**"

- a. awake b. unemotional; indifferent to pain c. friendly; kind d. happy; pleased

10) "Katie fought back the urge to tackle her musical hero with an **exuberant** hug"

- a. respectful b. casual; cool c. short; brief d. enthusiastic or joyful