AKI'S STORY  
for narrator and woodwind quintet  

NARRATOR  
Michael Mauldin, 1994  
Story by Penny Raife Durant  

(Wait until opening music has stopped)  

Aki (AH-kee) watched as the men checked their leather pouches and stone knives. His father pulled his fingers over the willow arrow shafts as if to straighten them once again. Then the men climbed down the Mountain and headed east and north, toward the flowing river.  

Aki's grandfather sat next to a large volcanic rock. With a sharp stone, he pecked at the rock's surface. Aki didn't know what his grandfather was writing. It might be the story of the hunt. It might be a map to show where they found water last summer when the rains had not yet come.  

Grandfather didn't mind missing the hunt as Aki did. Of course, being the recorder for the People was a very important job, one only the oldest and wisest of their clan was allowed to do.  

His mother and grandmother knelt on the ground and began grinding corn with their metates. "I will be back before the sun sets," Aki told his mother. Then he slipped his bow and quiver over his shoulder, leaving the Mountain and following the stream west. Perhaps he would find a deer of his own.  

(Pause for music to begin)  
(Begin reading 5 seconds after music begins):  

As Aki walked, he left no footprints. He had learned to walk gently on Mother Earth, disturbing nothing. He listened as he walked. Birds twittered and flew away. Grasshoppers sawed their autumn song.  

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He scanned the dirt for tracks. Aki found the small scampering scrapes of a kangaroo rat and the smooth slithering of a snake. But no deer.

As Aki walked, the slope became steeper. A tall bluff with many black rocks hugged the horizon. Aki heard the rattled warning of a snake.

He stood perfectly still, barely breathing, moving only his eyes in the direction of the sound.

The rattling stopped.

Still Aki stood, waiting for the snake to move on. They had no quarrel. At last he heard a soft slithering in the dry grass and whispered softly to the snake, wishing him good hunting, too. Then he walked on. Around a juniper, deer tracks dented the soft mud of the streambed. From the depth and size of the hoofprints, he knew it was a buck. He also knew it had passed here not long ago.

Aki followed the tracks behind a tower of sandstone and up a steep path. The deer had run to the top of the bluff.

The boy ran silently, and at last climbed over the edge. Ahead of him, alone and chewing the golden flowers of a rabbit bush, stood the buck.

(wait until music has stopped, then begin reading with no musical background):

Aki stared into the deep brown eyes. Silently, he thanked the deer for his life. A buck of this size would feed his people well for more than two weeks.

With movements as slow as growing, Aki slipped an arrow from his leather quiver and fitted it into his bow. He kept his eyes locked onto the buck.

Then something pulled his attention away. He turned only his eyes to the west, across the vast flat lands. Dust swirled upward. Only raiders came from the west.

Aki looked back at the deer. If he shot such an animal, he would be allowed to hunt with the men. But if he didn't hurry and warn the others, the raiders might take all the women and children. There would be no one left when the men came back.
Aki relaxed the bow. "Next time we meet, I will not let you go." The buck jumped from the sudden sound and bounded out of sight.

(wait for music to begin. Begin reading 5 seconds after music begins):

Aki sped down the bluff. His mother would light a fire to cook the corn meal. He had to reach her before the smoke rose. Aki ran softly against Mother Earth. He dared not leave tracks for the raiders to follow.

"Grandfather!" he cried. "Mother! Raiders are coming. I saw their dust."

"Where are they, Aki?" Grandfather asked. The women and children gathered around him. Aki saw fear in his mother's eyes.

"They are west of the bluff, less than a day."

"The men have gone hunting, and we don't know where to find them," Grandfather said.

"I could follow their tracks," Aki offered. "I will run after them."

"No," Grandfather said. "They have gone far already and they leave no tracks."

Aki's heart pounded and his breath came faster. He looked around at the People. Only he and his grandfather had ever handled a bow.

"We must hide," he said.

"There is no place to hide on the Mountain," said Grandfather.

Aki looked across the valley, past the river to the cottonwoods. "The growth along the river will hide us," he said.

"Gather food," Grandfather told the women. "Leave nothing to show we have been here recently."

The women ran and did as they were told, gathering black and grey pots filled with corn, squash, and beans.

Aki stashed large pots and grinding stones in a small cave hidden in a cleft of rock. Everyone was ready. It looked as if the People had abandoned their homes.
In the morning, one of the raiders splashed into the river, only a stone's throw from the People. He drank from the cool water and looked around. Aki crouched behind a bush, holding his breath until his chest throbbed. The raider seemed to look directly at him, then filled a buffalo bladder with water and tied it to the strap around his middle. He started toward the east bank of the river, toward the People.

A sudden cry split the morning stillness.

The man turned in the direction of the noise. Aki let his breath go. Then he slithered along the riverbank. He parted some weeds and looked across. The man joined the others grouped around the tracks Aki had made on the far side. They whooped, pointed south, and started off. Aki followed from the east side of the riverbank. He followed until the sun was directly over his head. Then he watched from the top of a hill, hidden by a juniper. The dust cloud continued south.

Aki hurried back to tell the People the raiders were gone. Just before dark, they walked back to the Mountain, afraid of what the might find.

Rocks were strewn around the mountaintop outside the stone houses. A few broken pots lay with sharp edges pointing to the sky. Aki checked the cleft in the rock. Nothing had been disturbed.

He carried the pots back up the mountain. Women scurried to reclaim their seeds. Grandfather told the women not to start a fire for three days, just in case the raiders were watching.

Aki kept a lookout in all directions. Ducks flew overhead in huge arrows pointing south. His heart sang when he saw the hunting party coming from the north late one evening.

(Wait for music to end.)
The men carried several deer carcasses tied to poles. None of the deer were as large as the buck Aki had seen. The men gathered around Grandfather to tell their hunting tales. In the glow of the fire, Grandfather listened and nodded. Then he told the story of the raiders. "You would have brought plenty of meat for only yourselves if Aki had not been with us."

The men stared at Aki, standing in his mother's doorway. His father motioned for Aki to join the circle.

"I see you have started a new carving, Grandfather," Father said. "Is it about the hunt?"

"No," answered Grandfather. "It is more important than a hunt. We must always remember Aki's bravery and how he helped his people survive."

In the morning before the sun peeked over the eastern mountains, Aki ran his hand lightly over Grandfather's pecking. His story would be told in the rock forever.
Pause for Narration, ending with: "Perhaps he would find a deer of his own."
Pause for narration, ending with,
"The buck jumped from the sudden
sound and bounded out of sight."
Pause for narration, ending with, "His eyes felt heavy, but he did not let them close."

Pause for narration, ending with, "A sudden cry split the morning stillness."
Pause for final narration, ending with, "His story would be told in the rock forever."
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"His eyes felt heavy, but he did not let them close."

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LL125-12 Slave
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