Girl with a Violin

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Abstract

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THERE is a story to be told — of a small girl with a violin and an old man and a springtime Saturday afternoon years ago on the sidewalk of a small town.

On every Saturday afternoon of my life for so long it seemed then it would always be — I would carry my three-quarter size violin over the religious route to my lesson in the big house beside the river on the other side of town, my teacher's house, where her blind mother kept all the plants on a big sun porch, and all the trees were large and old.

Five blocks of gravel road from the far end of the subdivision to the highway, and then the eight minutes of bus ride to town, and crossing the railroad track — be careful — you know last year there were two men killed — and then the big street — careful now — and then the safe quiet sidewalk going down beside Sears Roebuck's.

Here was the air vent from the air conditioner that sent out the hot air where I could stand and get warm from underneath in the wintertime. But only for a few minutes — you should be on time, for the lessons cost money. On a spring day, though, one went by without stopping, for it was almost too warm because you'd been made to wear a sweater, and it spoiled the sweet new smell of the air.

And on this spring afternoon it was only a few steps more when you saw an old man coming up the hill, going much slower than you were. But you, being a child, didn't have to notice until he began talking to you.

"You, little girl, play the violin — so fine — so fine." He had black hair. He was funny, of course.

"Someday you play fine — a lovely lady — you shall play . . . that's fine . . . fine . . . It is the best . . ." There was nothing I had to say, being a child.

"I had a violin once . . ."

I should have been going on because I would be late but he scared me, and still I wanted to smile to him first but I couldn't.

"I was good . . . but . . ."
I knew I should answer, but he didn't wait anyway. He was taking out his money and fingering through it in his hand and putting it in my jumper pocket, and there was nothing to do with my arms held down with the violin.

"Here . . . for a good girl who will play the violin . . . buy an ice cream . . . buy more. Yes, you will play . . ."

He put so many nickels — and some dimes too — in my pocket that I could feel the weight of them hanging on my dress. His smile was really nice. His clothes were clean.

"Thank you."

I looked up to say this, and I think I saw that he was crying a little. I didn't know what I should do. I couldn't open my mouth. I ran.

When I got past Sears Roebuck's, I turned around, and he was at the top of the hill looking and waving. He kept on waving. I was going to be late. I turned to cross the street, and I started to cry myself, hard, not knowing why at all, and I couldn't get my handkerchief out without putting down the violin, and I would be late, so I just kept on walking, letting my face drip while the money in my pocket banged my leg on every other step — two streets to cross (be careful, always) and the footpath across the vacant lot and over the creek bridge where birds hid underneath, and around the bend in the path where the hawthorne tree, just about to burst out pink, made a roof . . . and on . . . to the big house, my teacher's house.

I wasn't late for my lesson.

I never told anybody about the man. It took me a long time to spend all the money.

I thought sometimes, "Will I play as a lady? . . ." but then I forgot.

People want to pour their hopes into the pockets of children who have lives that could make their own dreams real — but the most of these dreams never are realized, though the hopes were given — with love. This may be important, I think. I cannot really know.

The man must be dead now. He knows nothing of me, and I will never play the violin as a lady. But I have a story to tell, and the hint that I shall feel something peculiarly
great when . . . when my years are more nearly gone and I shall look up on a spring-time afternoon and see a little girl coming down the hill with a black violin case in one hand and the other arm full of music books, her curls tangled up in the sweet fresh wind of another springtime.

— Elinor Holmberg, Sci. Sr.

DAVID

THE GUESTS CAME in groups of thirty or forty each week to stay at the ranch. And we, the "girls," smiled at them when we served breakfast and listened to stories of their adventures in the Black Hills on the porch at night, and taught them the 7 Step on "dance night." When the big brown bus with Triangle I painted in yellow on the side pulled into the drive each Sunday afternoon, they were just another bunch of people to feed and run errands for and be pleasant to. But as soon as they got off the hot, dusty bus and came to the porch for icy water they became the widowed Mrs. Argenbright, who talked enough to make up for the rest of the year, when she lived alone; the newlywed Johnsons trying so consciously to appear unconscious of each other, and seventy-year-old Mr. Erman, who had been all over the world, and announced, "You can't beat these corn-fed girls." They came from New York and Chicago and points between; some wore "authentic" pink Western hats and boots from Macy's, and some wore filmy silk dresses, hoping to meet the men of their dreams. Some I can't forget, though it's silly to remember.

One such was David Brierton. David was fifteen, six feet tall, with dark curly hair and deep, dark eyes almost hidden by long eyelashes. His face wasn't a man's face or a child's face, but there was none of the gawkishness of adolescence about him. I tried to think of a word to describe his face, and I could only come up with "sensitive." When I first saw him, my reaction was, "I'll bet he breaks the hearts of all the fifteen-year-old girls."