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Dr. Scholl's AIR-PILLO Insoles

MY MOST INSPIRING MOMENT

For almost an hour, the young violinist held his audience in silent wonder. I soon learned his name—famed Mischa Elman.



ILLUSTRATION BY NORMAN BAER

Was it merely fate that the paths of a celebrated writer and a famous violinist would cross in such a strange way?

UPON GRADUATION from a Midwestern university, I came to New York, driven by a relentless compulsion to write, which to this day continues to lay on the lash.

From the first day of my arrival in Mecca to this urgent now, it was to remain a city of enchantment; a city fearful and wonderful, one that can crack your bones and eat you, or exalt and inspire you.

But, somehow, its terribleness seldom overwhelmed me. Instead, I succumbed to its stimulation.

Without a friend or acquaintance, I explored it by day and sometimes by night, looking up at the windows of tall apartment houses and thrilling to the thought that within them artists might be at work—musicians, writers, composers, dreamers, doers. Fritz Kreisler might be up there, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Sinclair Lewis

And to think that I was actually breathing the very same air with them.

Day after day I trudged the exciting streets, peddling my manuscripts and, after each rejection, planning and plotting the next story. It was slow, sometimes tortuous going, but never for a moment did I regret the giant step to the Mecca where so many were struggling for that slippery first rung of the ladder.

One evening, I chanced to pass Carnegie Hall. At the time, I did not even know it by name, but I followed the crowds pouring in. As I approached the box office, I saw a sign which read: "Sold Out Except for Seats on the Stage." The idea of sitting on the stage intrigued me more than the concert itself, so I went in. Finally, I found myself perched in the front row of chairs arranged behind the orchestra—not only facing the packed amphitheater but also with a view off stage into the wings.

What an experience! I was an insider. The large orchestra

Violin Solo

By FANNIE HURST

Author of "Imitation of Life," "Back Street," "Humoresque," and the recent novel, "God Must Be Sad"



tuned up and burst into the overture.

In the wings, I could dimly discern from my point of vantage a little procession of silent figures moving single file through off-stage gloom toward the stage.

First, a small shawled woman holding to her bosom what appeared to be a warmly wrapped infant; following her, a near-sighted young man in heavy glasses; behind him, a man who obviously was his father; and last, three young girls aged about 9, 11, and 13.

I wondered: who could they be? A family of acrobats?

Then, before my fascinated eyes, the woman proceeded to unwrap the bundle she held so tenderly and drew out a violin. After handing it to the young man, she withdrew into the shadows.

THE OVERTURE flourished to its conclusion. The young man with the violin walked onto the stage to thunderous greeting and launched into a brilliant program that ranged from Bach's "Air for the G String" to Kreisler's "Liebeslied."

For almost an hour, the small, lonely-looking young man on the immense stage held his audience in a silence into which a pin would have dropped with a bang. Cheers recalled him for encore after encore, and all the while the shadowy group stood in the wings, the father foremost now, listening, listening.

Who was he?

Finally, I mustered courage to ask the man at my right for a look at his program. I read: Soloist—Mischa Elman.

I was immensely thrilled: Fannie Hurst of Cates Avenue, St. Louis, seated on stage a few feet away from Mischa Elman.

People frequently ask if I obtain my characters and situations from life. The answer is: almost never, insofar as writing of real-life situations or people I have met. But in the last analysis, all impressions indirectly result from people or situations.

I seldom am able to pinpoint the beginning of an idea, a character, or a plot. I might witness an emotional explosion between a man and a woman seated at the next table in a restaurant. But it would never occur to me to introduce it *per se* in a novel or short story. However, I may some day, subconsciously or unconsciously, use that episode in an unrelated situation. But I never deliberately go after material.

Thus the impressions of that Carnegie Hall concert lingered in my mind: that young genius holding a vast audience spellbound; the splendor of his music; the old man's hypnotic eyes transfixed on his son.

Without quite realizing why, I found myself wandering days on end through the overcrowded lower East Side of New York, winding my way through pushcart markets, peering into unsanitary passageways, riding the elevated trains for glimpses into tenement interiors as we sped past.

From whence had come that shadowy group in the wings of Carnegie Hall? From New York's storied slums? There were countless legends of genius that had sprouted in that fetid world.

It so happened that the Elman family had its roots in far-off Russia. Be that as it may, my mind kept chewing around that group like a candle flame nibbling its wick.

Gradually, a concept of a boy violinist out of a background dark and shadowy began to take shape in my mind. A family came to life, and I finally conceived a short story entitled "Humoresque."

After years of submitting stories and getting enough rejection slips to paper the walls of my room, "Humoresque" marked the beginning of my career as a successful writer. It was published in a national magazine and later in anthologies; it was translated into many languages; it was produced as a play and three times as a motion picture. Even now, it is not unusual for the orchestra to burst into Dvořák's "Humoresque" as I enter a restaurant.

UP TO THAT TIME I had never met Mischa Elman. But I married Jacques S. Danielson, who was his close friend. Thus my association with Mischa began, and it has lasted and intensified over the years.

Now the circle begins to round out to its perfection.

Following the death of my husband, I enjoyed the supreme fulfillment of creating a memorial to him. The medical college which received the endowment acknowledged it with a banquet. On the dais were many of my husband's closest friends, including Mischa Elman.

It had been suggested that he be asked to play. But I opposed it; Mischa was invited as a friend, not a performer. But as the evening moved to its climax, he suddenly rose, walked over to the toastmaster, and whispered to him. The toastmaster nodded excited consent.

Then, unannounced and on a borrowed violin, he proceeded to play, with unforgettable emotion, the "Air for the G String" and Kreisler's "Liebeslied."

No one there except the two of us knew that, in repeating the compositions he had played on another evening long before, he was rounding into a complete circle my most inspiring moment.

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