



## The Hand-Me-Down Violin

by John Keeser

Emma looked at the tattered brown leather case and sighed. The case is embarrassing, she thought, but at least I can replace that. It was the violin inside that looked much worse.

She knew she was fortunate that she had a violin to play in her school strings ensemble, but she couldn't help but compare this violin with everyone else's instruments. For instance, Hannah, an eighth grader who was first chair violinist, had a beautiful new violin and a soft padded case that she could wear like a backpack.

At least it sounds okay, Emma thought as she removed the violin from its old-fashioned case. After showing Emma how to replace the brittle strings, her teacher had helped her tune it that afternoon. "It has excellent tone," Mrs. Holden commented. "Where did you get this violin, Emma?"

When Emma told her it was her great-grandfather's, Mrs. Holden smiled, but Emma noticed a few of her classmates rolling their eyes. She felt herself blushing, as she self-consciously returned to her seat.

As the youngest of five sisters, Emma always had hand-me-downs of some sort. In addition to wearing her sisters' outgrown clothing, she had grown up playing with their old toys and riding their well-used bicycles. When Emma decided to learn to play the violin, one of the reasons the instrument appealed to her was that none of her sisters played it. All four of them played the piano and the guitar.

"The violin is a wonderful choice," said her mother at the time of school orchestra sign-ups, "and I know just where we can get your instrument." Emma thought she meant they would rent one from the music store, but she was in for a surprise.

That evening, Mom emerged from the attic with the old leather case. She carefully dusted it off before opening the metal clasps on the side and peering intently inside. "Well, it looks okay, but it has been neglected for a long time and will need some attention before you can play it," Mom said.

Then, Mom explained that it was her grandfather's violin. "His mother bought it for him at a pawnshop during the Depression when money was scarce, and my grandfather treasured it," Mom recalled, adding that her grandfather was his high school's first chair violinist.

Emma's grandmother played this violin as well, Mom continued, and had often expressed her desire that Emma's Mom play it as well.

"As you know, Emma, I was into sports not music, so the violin has been in storage for many years. I discovered it when I was sorting through Mom's things after she died...I am so glad you can play it now."

Emma didn't have the heart to complain after hearing Mom's story. She knew Mom did her best to provide things for her sisters and her. Ever since Dad died, it had been an up-hill battle for them financially, but Mom never complained.

Emma then placed the violin under her chin and maneuvered her bow in the correct position to begin her scale exercises. After the first few notes, however, she realized her bow needed a good greasing. Reaching around in the case's velvety interior for her new container of rosin, she noticed a small compartment inside the case she had not noticed before.

Inside was an old package of rosin, and Emma was startled when she saw her name on a flowery piece of stationery folded around it. She carefully unfolded it and began to read:

*Dear Emma,*

*Something tells me you will be the next violinist in the family. You have had a love of music since you were a baby. I remember playing violin music for you when you came to visit, and you smiled and clapped your hands. This is my father's violin. It doesn't look like much, I know, but the music it plays is sweet. This instrument has been well loved, and I am so thankful that I can leave it in your hands now, my darling girl.*

*All my love always,  
Grandmother*

Tears filled Emma's eyes as she read the note a second and then a third time. This violin was much more than a hand-me-down; it was meant for her to play, she realized with a new sense of gratitude.

Just then, she heard her mother's voice from the kitchen. "Emma, you're not finished practicing yet, are you? Is something wrong?"

"No, Mom. In fact, something feels very right," Emma answered and she lifted the violin to play.

