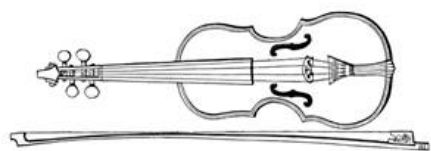




A TEST CASE

Isabella Alden

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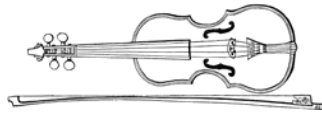


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PART I

OH, Aunt Patty, Aunt Patty! How can I ever thank you in the world! I don't know what to say, nor how to say it. Oh, mamma, mamma, do you hear what she says? I feel as though I should go wild!"

"I wouldn't," said Aunt Patty, making her shining needles click against one another, until you fancied you could see the sparks. "You'll need all your wits, I can tell you, if you are going to a city to live; specially a city like Boston, where the streets tumble round on top of each other, and don't appear to know half the time where they are going, themselves! Of all the cities I ever see for getting befuddled in, give me Boston."

"I know it will be lovely," declared Cora. "I don't care how crooked the streets are, I can find my way. To think that

I'm going to the great big music school, where all the grand people go! And am to learn to play on the violin! Oh, I am too happy to live! Aunt Patty, I'll love you forever!"

Two plump arms were thrown about the old lady's neck, and she was hugged unmercifully.

"Sho!" said Aunt Patty, trying to sit straight and look grim, though there was a softened tone to her voice even when she said *Sho!* "You'll forget all about me after you've been in Boston a while; like enough wouldn't know me if you should see me on the street."

"The idea!" said Cora, not indignant, only amused. There was nothing but folly in the thought that she should not know Aunt Patty if she saw her anywhere. "I should know you a mile away!"

It was really no wonder that Cora was, as she said, "almost wild" with delight. She was extremely fond of music, and had a great deal of musical talent. Since almost babyhood she had been familiar with her Uncle Ned's violin, and made what he called really respectable music for a "little kid."

During the last year she had taken lessons from the best music teacher the town afforded. When she first began, it seemed to her that she needed nothing more to make her perfectly happy; but quite often during the winter had been heard to say, with a sigh, that she would give "anything in this world" if she could go into Boston for just one term of

lessons. To be sure, she said it very much as she might have wished that she could take a journey to the moon. I do not know but she expected one as much as the other. Yet here she was, with the golden opportunity open before her: not one term only, but a whole year! And she was to take lessons of the most distinguished teacher that even Boston could offer! It is no wonder that Cora was surprised; in truth, she was not the only one; perhaps Aunt Patty herself was almost as much astonished as any of them.

She had a good deal of money carefully invested. No one but her lawyer and herself knew just how much; but she was very careful about spending it, and had never looked with much favor upon Cora's violin music.

"Just a silly little tinkle, tinkle, tinkle," she said, knitting fast as she spoke. "A good old-fashioned accordion beats it all to pieces, to my mind."

Yet it was Aunt Patty who arranged that Cora should go into Boston, which was fifty miles away from her home, and spend the entire winter studying her beloved music.

"She needs a rest from school, you all say," said Aunt Patty, "and you think it doesn't hurt her to play on that thing, so I don't see as she will ever have a better chance. I've arranged with my nephew that she shall board in his family. His wife is a good, capable woman who will see that she is took good care of, so there is nothing to worry about."

No, there certainly was not—at least in Cora’s opinion. For a week she could hardly get to sleep at night, and awoke as early as she could in the morning to think over her lovely prospects, so much grander than she had ever thought could come to her.

So that was the way it happened that she spent the winter in Boston.

She certainly did succeed wonderfully well with her music, and was selected to play at the grand concert with which the late spring term always closed. “The youngest scholar who had ever played at that concert” the girls assured her. Only the very best pupils were chosen for that occasion. There were some discomforts connected with the grand event, for some of the girls were envious, and did not hesitate to say that there were others who could play every bit as well as she, who had been overlooked; though they omitted to give any reason for such a proceeding.

Another thing which brought hours of anxiety was the fact that in Cora’s opinion, she had not a decent dress for such an important event. She wrote quires of paper to her mother about it, and received short, tender, anxious notes in reply, setting forth the utter impossibility of sparing money to get her a new dress at this time.

“Father had been unusually unfortunate, and has had unexpected expenses.”

“He always has!” said Cora to the walls of her room, for she was quite alone. “I never knew a year when father wasn’t unfortunate, and hadn’t unusual expenses!”

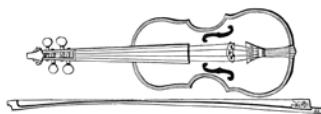
Then she brushed away some bitter tears, and drawing her writing desk to her, dashed off the most loving little letter that was ever written, to dear Aunt Patty, setting forth her needs and her troubles in such a pretty way that Aunt Patty, who had declared but the day before that the child’s best white dress was nice enough to wear anywhere, and that if her winter in Boston had made her vain, she would be sorry she had sent her there, tramped off down street within an hour after reading the letter, and came home in due time with the finest piece of white mull that the town could produce. Moreover, Aunt Patty—being a woman who never did things by halves—sent the muslin to Boston by the next mail; and with it a letter to that capable woman, her nephew’s wife, directing that such and such articles be bought to go with the dress, and that the dress itself be made by somebody who would know enough not to spoil a piece of goods like that; and the bill was to be sent to her.

All these directions were duly carried out, and on the evening in question the young musician certainly did justice to her pretty suit. A great many admiring eyes rested upon her, as her graceful bow drew sweet sounds from the instrument. So thought an old lady with very sharp eyes, peering out from under a queer bonnet. She gave almost

constant attention to Cora—indeed her gaze was so marked that the moment the young girl was seated, while the sound of applause with which her effort was received was still sounding, Alice Westlake whispered:

“Cora, do look at that funny old woman! You ought to notice her, for she is dreadfully struck with you; hasn’t taken her eyes off from you since you went on the stage. Only look at her bonnet! Did you ever see such a queer shape? I should think they would pay her a good price for that in the museum. And she has an umbrella! Of all things in this world—a cotton umbrella at a dress concert! Isn’t she too funny for anything? How do you suppose she happened to come here?”

Cora looked, and felt at once as though it would be a comfort to have the floor open and receive her, new suit, kid slippers and all. Aunt Patty, of all persons in the world! Aunt Patty, at an evening concert in Boston!



PART II

WHAT Cora saw was an old woman, in the ugliest bonnet, and a queer little black shawl, which even in the gaslight showed itself to be rusty with service. What should she do? What *could* she do? What was she to say to this chattering girl beside her? As for owning to any knowledge of Aunt Patty, it seemed to her utterly out of the question.

What a dreadful thing to happen on this night of her great triumph! She had cried a little because mamma could not afford to come to Boston to hear her play, and had been half-ashamed to think that none of her people were to be present, when they lived so near. But not for a moment had she thought that Aunt Patty might come. In all the six years

of her acquaintance with her, she had never known Aunt Patty to do such a thing.

Would she stay until the close of the concert, she wondered? Would she go to her nephew's afterwards? Why could she not have stopped there in the first place, if she must come, and let them get a little used to her?

"Though I'm glad she didn't," moaned the unhappy girl, "for I never could have played in the world if I had known that that old fright was looking at me! Oh, dear! I don't know what to do. I wonder if I could slip away the minute the concert is over, or before it is over? I might do that, if there was anybody to go with. I cannot have her asking for me and talking to me with all these girls looking on, and before Madame De Launey, too."

Meantime Alice was giving this silly girl all the trouble she could. "What's the matter?" she said. "Why don't you answer me? You look as though you saw a ghost, instead of an old lady. Oh, look at her spectacles! Did you ever see such big ones? I should think they would lame her nose. I declare, she is looking right at you; I believe she is nodding! Who do you suppose she is—who thinks she knows you?"

"How should I know?" said Cora, at last, speaking crossly. "I can't be expected to give you the history of every old woman who chances to come to the concert, can I?"

“Well, but this one acts so funny. Cora, I’m sure she is nodding. Did you ever hear the like? Bowing to people across a concert hall! Do you suppose she is crazy?”

“I presume so,” said Cora, taking refuge in lie suggestion; “she looks like it, I am sure. She fancies, I suppose, that she knows some of us over in these seats; crazy people have all sorts of notions, I know.”

“Why!” said Alice, with wide-open eyes, “I’m half afraid of her, aren’t you? It seems sort of dreadful to have a crazy woman sitting here looking at us. Oughtn’t we to tell Professor Wayland, or do something?”

“Nonsense!” said Cora, speaking very sharply. “What a little simpleton you are, Alice Westlake. Why in the world should we tell anybody? She is sitting there quiet enough.”

“Well, but she stares so, and all the time in this direction.”

“What if she does? Staring will not hurt anybody, I guess.” And then Alice’s attention was turned in another direction; during this chattering one of the pupils had been singing a song.

“Maude has lived through it,” said Alice. “How they are cheering her. I didn’t think she sang so wonderfully well, did you? Now it is recess. Let’s go over that way and get a nearer glimpse of that queer old woman. If she is crazy I should like to hear her talk. Hurry, before the way is all blocked up.”

“I’m not going,” said Cora, now fairly angry, and so distressed that she did not know what she was saying. “Do you suppose I want to go and hear a crazy old woman talk?”

But the “crazy old woman” was not waiting for her to come.

At Madame De Launey’s the “recess” was an institution; it lasted for fifteen or twenty minutes, and was indeed a sociable—a time when friends were greeted, and strangers introduced. Nothing was plainer than that Aunt Patty intended to take advantage of it to greet her niece. She made rapid strides through the crowd, and, despite Cora’s frantic efforts, pounced upon her just as she was about to dive under a broad settee.

“Well, Niece Cora,” she said, in a loud, clear voice, “I suppose you think you fiddled well, and I guess you did do as well as any of ’em; and looked about as prink, too, for all that I can see.”

“Prink” was a word of Aunt Patty’s very own. It was used only upon rare occasions, and meant the highest possible compliment. Under other circumstances, Cora would have been proud of having it applied to her; but at this moment her cheeks were blazing, and she had no words.

Pressing close beside her was Alice, with eyes astare and a dim idea that her friend was in danger from the assaults of a crazy woman, and that she ought to do something. She glanced about her wildly, and caught sight of Madame De

Launey herself pressing up behind them. She made a dash for that lady's elegant lace and satin robe, and said in a loud whisper, "Oh, Madame De Launey! That old woman is—"

But the Madame transfixed her with astonished, reproving eyes, and the next moment brushed past her and was beside the crazy woman.

"My dear Miss Perkins," she said, "this is an unexpected honor, and one heartily appreciated, I assure you. Professor Wayland, allow me to introduce you to my old and honored friend, Miss Perkins; she is the aunt and patron of one of your most promising pupils. Ah, Cora, my dear! I see you are surprised with the rest of us. I thought you could not have known of your aunt's coming, or you would have told me; but then you did not know that she and I were friends of long ago, did you?"

Cora did not know much in any direction just at that moment. The person whom of all others she would have liked to escape from was her friend Alice, whose eyes were not yet done staring in a bewildered way. What a horrid, deceitful, wicked girl she had been, actually to disown Aunt Patty and let her be considered a crazy person, because her dress was old-fashioned and queer; and here was Madame De Launey saying loud enough for dozens of grand people to hear, that she was her dear old friend, and Professor Wayland was offering his arm to her as though she had been a queen.

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It was all dreadful, but I think perhaps it had its useful side. Cora, I know, had a glimpse of her own heart such as she had never expected to see, and understood her temptations better after that.



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A TEST CASE

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