Chapter 14. Grade 8

I

In 8A Josy's math teacher was a sedate and dignified elderly lady, austere to the point of grimness. Miss Pressman was the epitome of staid self-restraint. She moved in a slow and regal fashion, and spoke in meticulous, precise tones. She elaborated upon a lesson somberly, presenting the most trivial details in a solemn manner. Even when not teaching, her bearing was stately and haughty. For the last part of each period she assigned drillwork for pupils to do at their seats while she worked at her desk up front.

Before long, several students noticed that during these quiet times Miss Pressman repeatedly bent over to her left, as if reaching down for something. She crouched in this position for long intervals. Nobody could figure out what she was doing, but everyone was growing more and more curious.

One day when Josy had a question and her raised hand continued to be ignored, she got up and walked quietly to the teacher's desk. There she saw the large double side drawer pulled wide open. Inside stood a huge jar of pickles. Miss Pressman was quietly helping herself, chewing with her head down while the class remained working at their seats.

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The eighth grade Science teacher was Mrs. Kolyupev. Once she took the class on a trip to the Franklin Institute at Twenty-first and Parkway, where they spent an hour in the Planetarium after visiting the museum. This was Josy's first encounter with the science museum, and she found it fascinating.

On one occasion Mrs. Kolyupev performed a clever demonstration to illustrate that alcohol evaporated faster than water. Asking which students wanted to become doctors, she selected a few to go to the blackboard. Each was given a wet sponge dipped in either water or alcohol. At a given signal, they all swept their sponges across the board. It was impressive to see the alcohol smears dry well ahead of the others.

When discussing light and color, Mrs. Kolyupev emphasized that black and white formed the greatest contrast of all.

"Remember that, girls," she announced, "especially when you grow up and want to dress to be noticed. The strongest contrast you can ever choose, no matter what happens to be in style, will always be black and white."

It was then that Josy came to realize that, by outlining any color in black, she could make it stand out sharply in her drawings. Black seemed to bring out the brightness and intensity of all other colors, and she began to use this idea in many pictures she drew, especially the countless ones of Spanish flamenco dancers wearing ornate combs in their hair.

She continued to like Mrs. Kolyupev until one day when, without warning, the teacher turned to look at her after asking her to stand up for an answer.

"My, but you're tall!" she mused out loud.

Josy froze in embarrassment. The whole class stared at her in curiosity. Before she had turned twelve, she had shot up to her adult height of almost five feet eight inches. Extremely self-conscious about being so much taller than most of her classmates, she just wanted to blend in and look as average as possible.

Immediately she knew, from the expression on the teacher's face, that Mrs. Kolyupev regretted her remark. Although she quickly changed the subject and moved on with the lesson, the incident left Josy feeling depressed and conspicuous. She never entirely trusted Mrs. Kolyupev again.

II

Even though they had moved from the Duncannon Avenue apartment building, the Sokoloffs continued to be the Feldmarks' good friends. Malvina's opinion of them dropped considerably, though, when she and Simon got into a discussion about current events. She had taken the train to Wildwood that morning to see about renting a place for the coming summer, and Simon picked her up in his car at the train station on his way home from work when she returned that night.

The year was 1938. Hitler's troops had just invaded the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia. Radios were a-buzz with the communiqué; newspapers screamed the story. Stepping off the train that evening, Malvina saw the headlines. As Simon drove up, she got into his car, shocked. Immediately she began discussing the situation.

"What are you getting so upset about?" Simon drawled. "So he invaded the Sudetenland! So what? Why get upset? Who cares?"

Malvina could hardly believe her ears. Later she and Jacques discussed the incident. They concluded sadly that the Sokoloffs were extraordinarily simple people, but despite this, their warmth, kindness, and enormous generosity of spirit were beyond measure. The friendship continued, but from then on Josy's parents took care to avoid topics of a serious nature in their presence.

This was the first time Malvina chose a summer place in Ventnor (a suburb of Atlantic City) instead of Wildwood. It made Josy somewhat unhappy, because Shirlee and Millie Granoff went to Wildwood that summer, and she would miss being with them for vacation. One time in August, Malvina did allow her to take the bus to Wildwood just for the day. It was a ride of over an hour, and the visit turned out less than satisfying. Her mother was waiting on a boardwalk bench in Ventnor when she returned.

"You didn't have a good time, did you?" she greeted Josy, who had not yet said a word.

"How did you know?" Josy asked, surprised.

"I could tell by the sound of your footsteps!" Malvina answered.

The Ventnor apartment was on a corner at Pacific Avenue, on the second floor above a tailor shop. It had a tiny kitchen, small bedroom and bath, and one huge living room with a couch where Josy slept. There was no air-conditioning in those days, and sometimes the place got even more oppressively hot because of the presses in the shop downstairs. During one especially sticky night, they took sheets and pillows up to the roof and slept in the open air till five in the morning, when it started to get light.

Despite the cramped quarters, occasional visitors still came to stay, willing to even sleep on the floor. One was Malvina's friend Esther Carson, the nurse from Chicago who now lived in Pittsburgh. Every summer for the past few years she had been coming east for her vacation; the previous year she had been one of the many guests at "The Ancient Castle", the old house in Wildwood. As soon as she arrived in Philadelphia every summer she would deposit her luggage at the Feldmarks' and immediately return to the railroad station to take off for the shore.

"I just have to look at the ocean," she would say, "Then I'll be right back!"

That summer she came directly to Atlantic City. Just before her arrival Malvina had been preparing a gift to send to Frania (the sister of Stashek's wife in Mexico). Frania was pregnant for the first time, and Malvina wanted to send her a pretty nightgown to wear in the hospital. Knowing that Frania could ill afford to pay a sizable import duty, she wanted to send it in a way to avoid this. Accordingly she wrapped the nightgown snugly inside a folded copy of *The Philadelphia Public Ledger* so the package appeared to be nothing but a newspaper, which would arrive duty-free.

Josy, amazed with the results of her mother's packing, boasted about it to Esther.

"What do you think that is?" she asked.

"It's a newspaper, of course," Esther replied.

"No it's not! It's a nightgown," Josy responded

"I don't believe it!" Esther cried. "I want to see."

"No," Malvina cried. "I won't be able to wrap it that way again. Just take my word for it. It's a nightgown."

But Esther begged so hard that Malvina eventually gave in and unwrapped the package. Esther exclaimed enthusiastically over the expertise of the packing, but now Malvina had a hard time re-wrapping it as before. She remained unsatisfied with her second attempt, blaming

Esther Carson.

Josy for causing the problem. Frania did receive the package intact, however, paying no duty, and wearing the nightgown proudly in the hospital when her son Alfredo was born.

This was the last summer that Esther Carson ever visited the Feldmarks. After a friendship of close to twenty years, she took offense at something Malvina said. The two were sitting on the beach chatting when Esther confided that she was growing fond of a gentleman who had shown an interest in her. Esther was in her late forties and had never been married.

"What shall I do?" she asked Malvina. "He's a professional man, a real gentleman, good company, refined, and he even has some money. But he's bald."

"So what?" exclaimed Malvina, astonished.

"Well, I'm not sure I like that," Esther responded.

"What does it matter?" Malvina wanted to know. "Besides, you seem quite interested in him. So what difference should it make that he's bald?"

Esther suddenly stood up, drawing herself to her full height.

"What do you mean, I'm interested in him?" she cried.

"Well, you seem to be, or you wouldn't be even considering the question," Malvina replied.

Esther left in a huff, returned to the apartment, packed her bags, and took the next train out of Atlantic City. Though Malvina wrote several letters, she never heard from Esther again.

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Another visitor they expected that summer was Fannie Weinberg from Chicago. Fannie, Celia Kirson's niece, was now in her late twenties. She had written that she was being sent from work to attend a Social Workers' convention in Atlantic City that August, and they looked forward with anticipation to seeing her. But when August came, Fannie never appeared. Day after day they waited in vain.

"Would she even be able to find our place?" Josy wanted to know.

The entrance to the second floor apartment was a narrow door on a side street, with no number posted, and easily overlooked from Pacific Avenue. To help Fannie find them, Josy turned the record player up to its highest volume. Then she played Lizst's "Second Hungarian Rhapsody" over and over. If Fannie walks by and hears classical music, she reasoned, it might occur to her that we're here. After all, she reflected, very few people in

Atlantic City would be playing classical music all day long. Still, Fannie never came.

Finally Malvina found out where the convention was, and went there. The meetings were over, but she discovered from somebody closing down a booth that Fannie had been staying at the Blenheim Hotel not far away. She reached the place just as Fannie was packing to return to Chicago. It was too late to bring her back to the apartment, but at least Malvina got to visit with her briefly. They even took a short walk together despite the rain that had started. Fannie had indeed come looking for them, but was unable to locate the apartment. Her inquiries at the tailor shop downstairs had yielded no information. The name "Feldmark" meant nothing to the tailor; he never connected it with the family upstairs. Later, Fannie remembered hearing strains of Lizst's "Hungarian Rhapsody" coming from a nearby window, but never associated this with the Feldmarks.

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One Saturday night when they were sitting on the Boardwalk, Jacques noticed a couple walking towards them.

"Don't they look like the Kormans from Chicago?" he asked Malvina, though they were still rather far off.

"It is the Kormans!" she exclaimed in disbelief as they approached. A moment later they were all exchanging cries of excitement and surprise. These acquaintances had decided to visit Atlantic City on a whim for a few hours on their way home from New York. Though not close friends, they were delighted and amazed at this chance encounter so far from Chicago. Jacques and Malvina also continued to marvel at the strangeness of the coincidence.

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At the Shellbourne Hotel just off the boardwalk a quartet of Philadelphia Orchestra members performed every week in free chamber music concerts. On Wednesday nights Josy went to hear them. Usually she was the only teenager present. Sometimes she would see her parents' friends in the audience. One couple, Nathan and Rae Goldberg, were

acquaintances of the Sokoloffs. Rae, a pleasant, round-faced woman, was always especially nice to Josy, talking to her as an adult. Nathan was a professional violinist.

For the past two years, Josy had been trying to find out the name of a tango she had heard repeatedly at her uncle's home during her summer in Mexico. They had listened to it over and over on the record player, and she thought it one of the most beautiful she had ever heard, but was unable to identify it by name. She had tried humming parts of it to various people, and had even gone to Presser's Music Store to buy a copy, but nobody seemed to know it.

"Unless you give us a name we can't help you," the salespeople had told her.

One night in Ventnor she asked the Goldbergs about it after the hotel concert. As soon as he heard her hum the opening bar, Nathan replied, "Sure, that's 'El Choclo', it's the most famous of all tangos. I'm surprised nobody knew!"

Josy was impressed and delighted. Once back in Philadelphia she went to Pressers and bought not only the sheet music, but also the record. It remained one of her favorites, and she always referred to it as "my tango".

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The Goldbergs knew a family in Ventnor with a piano who agreed to let Josy come there to practice. They had come into money quite suddenly, and decorated their four-story vacation home with all the luxuries they could think of, many out of place in a summer beach house. Expensive Oriental carpets lined the floors, two sofas in the living room were upholstered in plush dark velvet, while expensive heavy damask drapes that framed ornately embroidered chiffon curtains hung in the bay windows. From the way they spoke, Josy judged them to be poorly educated; in fact, she sensed that they were barely literate. Yet huge bookcases held scores of volumes, many with classical titles in matching sets, all collecting dust. The piano in the massive living room was a full concert grand, but nobody in the family played.

One day when she arrived, the mail had just been delivered.

"Look what I got!" the wife cried out to her husband in the other room. It was a post card from their adult son who had been away for several months. Haltingly she struggled to make out the writing, finally giving up, passing the card to Josy for help. In its entirety, it read, "Dear Mom, I'm O.K., Joe."

The woman beamed. Then her husband came into the room, waving a similar card over his head.

"Ich hob ohet gekreigen aineh!" (I got one, too), he boasted with a proud smile. He handed his card to Josy. It read, "Dear Pop, I'm O.K., Joe."

She came there to practice once or twice a week. Many times she found the experience unexpectedly entertaining, for inside a birdcage suspended from the living room ceiling sat a parrot that often cursed in Yiddish.

"Gay aveck!" he would screech, over and over. "Gay aveck! Gay aveck! Du bist ein schveinhundt!" ("Go away! Go away! You're nothing but a piggish dog!")

"I don't know where he gets it!" the woman apologized to no one in particular. "We never use bad language in our house."

Yet whenever she and her husband addressed each other, it was always in Yiddish. And often when Josy sat down at the piano and started to play, the bird would accompany her, shrieking its head off in shrill operatic flourishes.

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That summer her father suggested that she try reading Jules Verne, and Josy immediately became enthralled by the adventurous style and breath-taking imagination of his stories. What excited her most were the concepts he introduced, many of which (such as rocket ships and travel to the moon) were unrealized at that time. From the Atlantic City High School Library she took out every Jules Verne book she could find. She had just finished reading *Michael Strogoff* when an ad for its movie version appeared in the local paper. The film was playing in a small theater at the opposite end of town.

She happened to come across the notice on the final day the movie was playing. Jacques, who was on vacation that week, agreed to take her to see the movie that evening. They ate supper early, then rushed across the street to catch the bus for the theater. There was only one performance that night, and it would start in about twenty minutes. The bus was pulling up to the corner just as they came out the door. Running, they caught it at the next block and boarded. Jacques reached into his pocket for the fare, but all he had was a twenty-dollar bill.

"I can't make change for that," the driver told him.

Frustrated, they had to get off the bus and walk back home. By then, it was too late

to go. Josy never did get to see that movie until twenty-five years later. It turned out to be rather uninspiring, though the exaggerated anticipation she had built up for it through the years doubtless contributed to her disappointment.

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It was on the sidewalk outside the Atlantic City Library that she learned to ride a two-wheeler. Every Sunday morning they rented a bike, and Jacques would run behind it, holding the seat steady while she pedaled and steered. This continued for several weeks, Sunday after Sunday. Round and round the block they went, chatting as she kept relying on his hold to keep her balanced.

One Sunday she reached the end of the block puzzled about why he had neglected to answer any of her questions. Glancing back, she suddenly spotted her father far off at the other corner a full block away. She had ridden the whole distance by herself without realizing it! At that point, she fell.

III

It had been a pleasant enough vacation, although she really missed Shirlee and Millie Granoff. That summer she switched from cherry sodas with vanilla ice cream to all-vanilla milk shakes as her favorite at the drug store. She did a great deal of drawing, often taking crayons and paper to the beach. She also determined to compose an opera, but got only as far as the first four bars before realizing that any musical ability she might have lay more in performing than composing.

Back at school in the autumn, she practiced hard in singing class trying to hold on to the alto melody in four-part singing. But the minute she heard others singing the soprano part, she involuntarily switched to that. The visiting music supervisor from the Board of Education's Administration Building at Twenty-first and Parkway who came to Cooke to hear try-outs for All-City Choir immediately recognized this. On the first round of singing she ruled Josy out.

"You don't have a musical ear," she concluded when Josy came to beg for a second chance. "You just don't have any aptitude in music."

By now Josy had been studying piano for over five years. She instantly knew all the answers to Mrs. Rile's music quizzes, while other pupils looked to her beseechingly for some signal to help them during the tests. The only other student in class who knew more about music was Irwin Hoffman. He had already performed on the violin as a child prodigy, playing in school assemblies as well as in competitions throughout the city, one with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Later he would enjoy a prestigious career in music, first as Conductor of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, and after that as Resident Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra in Costa Rica. In eighth grade Irwin also failed to make the All-City Choir because, as the supervisor put it, he too "lacked a musical ear".

Josy did get to sing in the school production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*. She was one of the "ladies" of the chorus. That meant wearing a Victorian costume and combing her hair in an upsweep, something considered daring though chic at the time. She always tried to position herself next to Verna Blackman in the chorus to feel a bit more confident on stage. Directly in front of her, a ninth-grade boy named Dan Wolf stood swaying and bellowing his heart out in the solo part of DeadEye Dick. Josy would get to know more about Dan the following semester when she started French in 9A while he was repeating the subject.

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In 8B there was a sudden craze for codes. Students passed notes to each other during Study Hall, and it was even more exciting if the notes were in code to mystify those passing the folded papers along. Josy invented a code of symbols that looked Chinese. She achieved the effect by forming each stroke as an elongated triangle instead of a single straight line. The messages looked intriguing, and she shared the code with only two of her friends, Frances Jacobs and Miriam Hoffman. Others tried unsuccessfully to decipher it until, one day, she started the message with the words "Dear Miriam" followed by a colon. From this somebody deduced that the first word must be "Dear" and from then on the rest was easy to unravel.

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That year the school held an art contest, the topic being the conservation of trees.

Josy constructed a poster showing a leafy oak tree. Using brown crayon she colored in the trunk, and something in the consistency of the crayon inadvertently caused it to come out in blotches on the cardboard. This unexpectedly gave the realistic effect of rough bark, and Josy won second prize. Although she had achieved her result purely by accident, the poster served to call her to the attention of the art teacher, Miss Gillen, who submitted her name, along with that of the first-prize winner, Marion Chase, for free art lessons at the Graphic Sketch Club. For the next three months, the two of them got excused early from school at 1:30 each Monday to go to South Philadelphia for classes.

Upon arriving, she and Marion were directed to places in a huge studio where forty others were seated, most of them much older, some already majoring in art at college. The teacher, a man in his sixties wearing a beret and smock, strolled around the room in a bored fashion, observing the paintings in progress. Rarely did he say anything to anybody. To Josy and Marion he merely instructed, "Draw anything you want." After that, he ignored them. Once in a while he came by their easels, sniffed disapprovingly, and then moved on. This was the extent of the training they received there.

Back at Cooke, however, things were different. Miss Gillen proved an enthusiastic teacher, explaining the dynamics of the color wheel, then assigning students to create a design using two complementary tertiary colors along with another tertiary adjacent to one of the other two. Josy chose red-orange and blue-green as her complementaries, with chartreuse as the adjacent. It was a combination she loved, and it remained her favorite for years.

Another delightful project involved music as well as art. Asking the class to depict their impressions of Beethoven's Eighth Symphony, she played a recording of the second movement. They were then given two lessons to construct a picture. Josy fashioned a staff of music containing a G-clef sign with the five lines and four spaces curving gracefully around the page. Scattered along this staff, in place of notes, she drew miniature fairies and flowers, randomly interspersed. The effect was airy and light. The project gave her a great deal of pleasure as she tried to capture the mood of the music in the visual design.

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There was another teacher named Miss Gillen who was not related to the art teacher. This woman taught Spanish. Josy got her in 8B for a course called General Language

Miss Gilen.

designed to help students decide which foreign language to start in ninth grade.

This Miss Gillen had strong political views, and she used her classes to propagandize. A staunch supporter of the Italian dictator Mussolini, she preached that he was the greatest leader in the modern world, as confirmed by his 1935 invasion of Ethiopia which, according to her, "civilized savages and helped build roads". As for Hitler, she explained, he was to be esteemed in every way but one, namely that he considered women inferior to men, designed mainly to breed. Despite this unfortunate flaw, she insisted that the future world could look to Mussolini and Hitler to create Utopia.

She presented these views to a class that was over ninety percent Jewish. As can be imagined, she was hardly popular. But fear of retaliation on their report cards deterred most students from speaking up. Another teacher, Miss Bessie Burchet at West Philadelphia High School also vigorously propounded similar ideas. Perhaps because her students were older and less easily intimidated, fifteen hundred of them staged a two-day walkout one day, which made newspaper headlines and scandalized the entire community.

Miss Gillen taught the basics of comparative language (Spanish, French, German, and Latin) including their structures and history. Every Friday she lined up the class along both the sides and back of the room. Then she threw out questions on what they had been learning. She recorded in a small notebook who answered correctly and who did not. When students gave correct responses, they moved up one place in line. Before long a certain fixed order established itself, with the same students ending up in the same positions (the best at the front of the line, the poorest at the end). Israel Shenker (known to his classmates as Buddy) regularly held on to first place, Henry Schaeffer to second. Josy usually was about tenth or twelfth in line. This oral quizzing formed a sizable portion of the report card mark.

Miss Gillen loved to ask repeatedly, "List the days of the week in German." Whenever those who neglected to study or pay attention got this question, they fell back on the Yiddish they knew from home. They recited all the days perfectly until they got to

"Saturday". Here they would sing out "Shabbas" instead of "Samestag", whereupon Miss Gillen screamed at the top of her lungs, "Get to the end of the line", insisting that they go to the last place rather than moving just one position down.

One Thursday afternoon Miss Gillen got sidetracked onto her favorite topic, Mussolini and Hitler. This time, however, she went a step further than usual, insisting that these two leaders would save the future of mankind by purifying the world racially. The entire class gasped.

At this point, Buddy Shenker raised his hand, stood up, and began to argue with her. The lesson turned into a lengthy debate, the class urging Buddy on with suggestions and whispered encouragement. Throughout it all, he remained cool and unemotional. Point after point he rebutted her logic, politely and systematically countered every argument with a rational and level-headed response. He quietly pointed out the merits of democracy over dictatorship, and emphasized how despicable were the violence, anti-Semitism, and racism in both dictators' philosophies. It was an amazing performance for a thirteen-year-old.

Miss Gillen became more and more provoked. Not only did she now have one hundred percent of the class against her, but her arguments sounded ever more hollow. The beauty of the whole thing, in everybody's eyes, was that there was no way she could retaliate against Buddy. He was the star of the class, with a perfect grade average. Had she given him anything less than an "A" on his report card, it would have been too blatant an infraction to justify. His extreme politeness and calm throughout the lengthy discussion further deprived her of any chance to accuse him on behavioral grounds.

The argument ended with Miss Gillen sniffing that Buddy was entitled to his own opinion, even if he was wrong. Ignoring her, and exploding in pent-up emotion as the dismissal bell rang, the rest of the students stood up and cheered. The story circulated through the building, with teachers and pupils alike talking about it for weeks. It made Buddy the most popular boy in eighth grade and, the following term he was elected almost unanimously as president of the school.

IV

As Josy advanced in her piano studies, Mr. Potamkin kept making further demands. "The true test of whether you really know a piece," he told her, "comes when you can play

it not only by memory, but by heart in slow motion. When you go at a regular tempo, you can glide over a mistake. But at snail's pace! That's when underlying problems show up."

She found this to be true. Following his instructions diligently, she made steady progress.

He had another suggestion that she also found useful in memorizing verbal material.

"When you start a new piece," he told her, "look it over first and then divide it into several sections. Call them A, B, C, and so on, and write in that lettering at the start of each section.

"Then memorize just one or two measures from the beginning of each part."

After doing this she worked on all the sections simultaneously, adding a measure or two to each part every day, until she was finally able to connect the sections and play the number straight through. This proved extremely useful if she forgot something, for she could jump ahead to the beginning of the next section and keep going. It also made her give equal attention to all the parts, not just the beginning of the piece.

At the end of each season, Mr. Potamkin held a piano recital in which all of his pupils performed. During the first two years that Josy studied with him, these took place in the second-floor auditorium of the Presser Building downtown. By 1939, though, the Potamkins moved into their new home in Elkins Park, a house they designed and had had built themselves, and then the recitals were held there.

The concerts started precisely at two o'clock on a Sunday afternoon late in May or early in June, and the performers and their guests began arriving an hour before. The recital always began with the youngest and then progressed on to the most advanced. When Josy participated for the first time she was thirteen, scheduled somewhere halfway through the program.

Written invitations were sent out to parents, encouraging them to bring as many guests as they liked. Before the concert, Mr. Potamkin's young daughter Genia Lynn, acting as usher, handed out printed programs listing names of the performers and the pieces they would play. Usually there were about a hundred people in the audience, and the atmosphere was extremely formal.

Josy was nervous as the students all stood backstage taking turns peeping out from behind the curtain before going out one by one to perform. She worried about making a mistake in front of such a large audience, even though she knew her piece well. Each student got an encouraging word or two from Mr. and Mrs. Potamkin, then stepped out on to the stage, some relaxed and smiling, a couple shaking with fright. When they returned

behind the curtain most were all smiles, weak with relief.

This was Josy's second year, and the piece she had to perform was "Nocturne" by Grieg. It was low on her list of favorites, but Mr. Potamkin insisted that it suited her perfectly. When her turn came, she pulled back the curtain, walked nervously to the concert grand in the middle of the stage, sat down, took a deep breath, and began. Everything went smoothly and she was just starting to gain confidence when, halfway through, her mind went blank. Without warning she found herself unable to remember what came next. Unsure of what to do, she forced herself to hit a few random chords, then went on to the next section of the piece without stopping. From this new foothold she continued on to the end. She felt mortified for making this mistake in front of a full audience, and felt that she had disappointed both her teacher and herself.

When the ordeal was over, she got up, bowed slowly to the audience, then lifted the curtain and returned backstage. To her amazement, both Mr. and Mrs. Potamkin stood there beaming.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed. "That was absolutely wonderful! Exactly the right thing to do! You didn't break down! You kept right on going! Excellent!"

"Cool as a cucumber!" Mrs. Potamkin added. "Cool as a cucumber!"

When Josy remained unconvinced, Mr. Potamkin continued, "Believe me, nobody in the audience, maybe just one or two people, if that, ever knew you made a mistake! You covered up beautifully! So much better than stopping—it was exactly the right thing to do!"

They kept lavishing praises on her as enthusiastically as if she had played the number perfectly. It was not for her playing, she realized, but for poise in a difficult situation. Although she remained dissatisfied with herself, she learned an important lesson about self-control that would stay with her long after the Grieg "Nocturne" was forgotten.