

The Violin Maker

A full-length play

By Christopher G. Smith

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ACT 1

As the lights come up we see the workshop of the Mosel family. It is a rather small room. Workbenches surround the space. The walls are filled with tools, all neatly organized on a peg or holder. Some tools are very familiar and others very specialized. These are the tools of violin making. Violins line part of the wall, while necks, bridges, and other parts are found around the room. Violins in various phases of being finished hang from a line across the room. Some are "white" violins. We get the overall impression of a very well used and organized space. Without organization the items in this room would never fit.

The morning light comes through the window on stage left. A door up center leads to a larger storage area for wood and through that room a back entrance.

WILHELM MOSEL moves about the shop setting out pieces to work on for the day and gathering tools. WILHELM is the eighty year old grandfather of KARL. WILHELM speaks with a slight German accent.

The door on stage right opens. KARL MOSEL step in. KARL is a young man in his early 20's He wipes his feet and brushing the snow from his coat.

WILHELM looks up and sees his grandson. He smiles and laughs.

WILHELM

Karl! Is good to see you. I was hoping you'd stop by before you went back.

He crosses to him and gives him a bear hug.

WILHELM

Is cold, ya?

KARL

Yes Grandpa.

WILHELM

Winter does not let go easily here, but it is only March.

(He laughs)

Another two months maybe?

KARL

I hope not.

WILHELM

Who knows? Here, your coat.

WILHELM takes KARL's coat and
hangs it on a hook. He turns to
him

WILHELM

Is good to see a coat there again. See? Your papa's place,
next to mine. Looks good there?

(Pause. No response from

KARL)

We'll see.

WILHELM claps his hands together

WILHELM

It's cold. Let me check the fire.

WILHELM crosses to the wood stove.

WILHELM

In da old days we never used a fire. Do you know dis?

KARL

No.

WILHELM

Ya. No fire. Only for da women. We were strong. Never got
cold.

KARL

Is that right.

WILHELM puts a little wood in

WILHELM

Sure. How can you burn wood if you make your living from da wood? Burn up your money? Go hungry then. My papa, he tells me, "just bundle up good."

KARL

(Smiling for the first time)

No. This is one of your stories.

WILHELM

Make up stories? Never!

KARL

Always!

WILHELM

Well, maybe little stories, ya. But about my papa? Never.

KARL

So, you want me to believe he made you work on violins in a room with no heat.

WILHELM

None. Just da cold. "Keep alert," he says, "No mistakes!" It takes da tree how long to make this wood? Then to age it? Years... "Work in da cold," he says. "Waste no wood that way."

(False hurt)

You don't believe me, Karl? How can you tell da stories if you don't believe da stories?

KARL

This sounds like a story.

WILHELM

Alright! No, no. You da learned man, know everything now....

KARL

Grandpa! Don't be like that.

WILHELM

I understand, da grandpapa is an old fool.

KARL

No, it's just...

WILHELM

What? Just what?

KARL

Well, it's a pretty hard to believe.

WILHELM

What that my papa knows da right thing?

KARL
No! It's just... well how could you use tools? I mean with
the cold your hands would...

WILHELM
Hands didn't get cold.

KARL
Well, they'd have to....

WILHELM
No. We had da mittens.

KARL
Mittens?

WILHELM
Ya.

KARL
You carved wood with mittens on?

WILHELM
(False anger)
Not mit mittens on!

KARL
(exasperated)
Then how did you do it?

WILHELM
Took them off! Took da mittens off to carve. Each pair.

KARL
Pair?

WILHELM
(False anger)
Ya, Each Pair off! Take off one, two...

KARL
I knew it.

WILHELM
(Starts to laugh)
three...

KARL
I knew it!

WILHELM
(Laughing)
Got you good, ya?

KARL
Yes. I played right into it.

WILHELM
(Laughing)
That was good! Ya, we had fire in da old days! We crawled
out of da cave and invented it, your papa and I!
(Laughing)

KARL
I knew it was a story all along.

WILHELM
Didn't know. My Karl so use to da college where they talk
and you write it down. No questions! But, you got to
question da grandpapa!

KARL
I'll say!

WILHELM
I have to tease you a little.

KARL
You tease me a lot!

WILHELM
That's what da grandpapa is supposed to do. You're such a
serious young man. What has happened to you? Suddenly life
has become a very serious thing?

KARL
I don't know.

WILHELM
Well it's good you come here. Dis was a place where your
papa and I had a lot of fun together. You know?

KARL
Yeah, I remember.

WILHELM
You shouldn't be so serious. Young men are supposed to be
happy! Supposed to be foolish! Full of beer and big
opinions.

(Laughs)
Maybe you should come home more often. See da grandpapa.

KARL

I know. I should, but I like campus life and... It's just still hard.

WILHELM

Hard to come home? You have an auto....

KARL

It's hard for me to be here. In this place. Could we go back up to the house?

WILHELM

But it's good to have you here, have a little fun with you. To see your coat on da hook there.

KARL

Grandpa, don't plan on...

WILHELM

Shh.... Quiet. Just, close your eyes.

WILHELM does. KARL waits a moment and then closes his eyes.

WILHELM

Now, inhale!

(Pause. Smiles)

Smell that?

KARL

What?

WILHELM

Da wood! This room and all da wood! Nothing like it. Maple, little spruce. Snow turning to spring rains. Like being deep in da old forests!

(Opens his eyes)

Nothing like this place.

(Pause)

You smell these things?

KARL

(A little surprised)

Yeah.

WILHELM

Good! Then open your eyes. You remember this. This wood, this smell.... Magic! Someday, maybe you'll be far away from this place. Hang on to this. This is something. See?

We make the music here. You may have to close your eyes to find it one day. But it's here.

KARL

Could we just...

WILHELM

Just a moment, I need to check da fire.

He crosses to the wood stove

KARL walks over to the stove and stands as WILHELM adds some wood

KARL

I really like college, you know?

WILHELM

Ya? Your mother says this semester maybe not so much.

KARL

I struggled a little, tough classes, I don't know, I just... with everything that happened...

WILHELM

She says you quit some course? Mosels don't quit.

KARL

Dropped. I dropped a course. People do. It was just too much for me right now.

WILHELM

You pay for da class but drop? Makes no sense. You were always a good student.

KARL

I am a good student. I just had a really bad semester.

WILHELM

You study hard?

KARL

Yes, but... Everything's changed now. I couldn't get motivated, I just felt so bad. You know?

WILHELM

Ya. Hard for me too. But, I still had my work to do, so.. And the school was your work.

KARL

I just got too far behind. You can't understand. I can make the class up.

WILHELM

You have to make it up. Ya?

KARL

Yes. That's why I'll be staying on campus for the summer.

WILHELM

Staying on campus?

KARL

Yes.

WILHELM

You mean living there?

KARL

Yes.

WILHELM

But you come home. You always come home.

KARL

I have. But I need the class to graduate and, I need to get a good job this year.

WILHELM

A job? You have a job here.

KARL

No. I'm getting a job on campus.

WILHELM

What in da gas station or something? Then you pay rent. You save no money that way.

KARL

I could do better job than that...

WILHELM

Mit what? What skills you have, huh?

KARL

Hey, I've almost got my bachelors.

WILHELM

Sure, you learn ideas from books. This is good. But what can you do?

KARL

I can do a lot. I'm great at accounting. And to land a job after college I need some real business experience. So that's my focus now.

WILHELM

If you live in da college town, how will you make your violin?

KARL

Violin?

WILHELM

To make a violin takes time. How can you make da violin if you are not here?

KARL

I wasn't planning on making a violin.

WILHELM

You are da teaser now, yeah?

KARL

No Grandpa.

WILHELM

Da son makes da violin. In our family, da son always makes da violin to be played in his papa's honor. It will be one year come this fall and you still haven't started.

KARL

I don't know how to make a violin.

WILHELM

You know some, da rest you will learn.

KARL

I can't take that on. I'm in college now.

WILHELM

If I can teach your dummkopf papa, I can teach you.

(Laughs)

He was no good when he started, he nearly ruined da violin business you know?

KARL

What?

WILHELM

Oh ya, I will tell you sometime. Not everything naturally comes mit da Mosel name. He was a disaster at first.

(Laughs)

Maybe it's a good thing he didn't try to teach you.

KARL

I loved him, Grandpa. Making or not making a violin won't change that. It's just not for me.

WILHELM

How do you know until you try?

KARL

No. This was all decided a long time ago when I left for college. Dad understood.

WILHELM

But, you must make. Every Mosel son for 300 years has made a violin to honor his Papa.

KARL

What's the point? Dad and I were through this a million times. I'm sorry, I know this has been a tradition. You are a Luthier. Making violins is what you love. But I couldn't breathe if I were trapped in this little shop. It's not what I want to do.

WILHELM

How do you know what you want?

KARL

How does anybody know? It was great life for you, but it's not for me.

WILHELM

Fine, so don't be a violin maker. Find your own way. Your papa accepted this, I understand. But you must make one violin. Da one to honor your papa.

KARL

I wouldn't even know where to begin.