

t Invention, a novel

by Judith Laura

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Chapter 1

When I play keyboards in rock-jazz fusion bands I go by the name Wind. Ben gave me that name. I could have made it fancier by using another word with Wind, like Windstorm, or Soft Wind, or Wild Wind. But I wanted to just be Wind—that could sometimes blow one way, sometimes another.

When I perform classical piano I go by the name my parents gave me, after both my grandmothers. I like being connected to my grandmothers that way. I feel especially close to my mother's mother, who was a pianist. I never met her. But I know a lot about her. I suppose some of it's from what my mother told me. But I don't think she told me all I seem to know. I could say I found a diary that my mother wrote giving all the details of her life, especially the stuff from the 1960s and '70s that people today seem to think is so cool. But my mother's an artist and doesn't do diaries. And I could say I found letters from my grandmother revealing what a wonderful, sensitive person she was even though my mother hated her. But Ma says Grandma hardly ever wrote letters.

So that's not how I know this stuff. Like I said, some of it my mother told me. But the rest of it—

I know this is harder to believe than diaries or letters, but what's the point if I don't tell the truth? So here it is:

The rest of what I know comes from what I feel flow through me when I'm playing music, like when I'm practicing the piano. Not when I'm performing at a concert because then I'm too nervous. But I get lots of stuff when I'm at the keyboards with the band, when we're just riffing for ourselves.

When it comes to me, it feels like memories—but memories I couldn't possibly be remembering. I guess things my mother told me combine with the stuff I remember from my own life and then the music makes my imagination take off. For example, the way my grandparents met—my mother told me that story so many times I feel like I was there:

Between the Brahms and the Beethoven he asked her to marry him and she said yes.

Taking a break from their music-making, Alice had gotten up from the piano and gone into the kitchen to get some tea. Her parents sat at the kitchen table, Poppa sipping his tea through a sugar cube like in the old country while reading the Yiddish newspaper and shaking his head over what was brewing in Germany with Adolph Hitler, Momma crocheting and wiping her eyes of the moisture she said her allergies put there.

When Alice started fussing with the teapot Momma said in her thick Jewish-Polish accent, “*Kindele*, let me do that. You go back with Isadore.”

But Alice kept on making the tea, enjoying the feeling of doing something for Izzy. Momma laid aside her crocheting and wiped her hands on her housedress. At the stove, she shooed Alice away.

Izzy in the meantime had begun going over a part in the music he had found difficult when they were playing together. Alice knew he wasn't aware of her as she stood in the darkened vestibule next to her father's closed sewing machine, thinking how handsome Izzy looked as he lunged into the piece, his bowing arm moving rapidly and strongly back and forth over the

forehead and glistening above his moustache. Then he made a gesture that meant he had become impatient with his own inability to get a passage just right.

"Momma will bring the tea in a minute," Alice said, emerging from the shadows. "I'm tired of the Brahms for tonight. Why don't we do the Beethoven?" She changed the music on the piano music holder.

"Sure," he said, sighing as he closed his Brahms. "But first let's sit down on the sofa a minute and wait for the tea." She sat down next to him. "We play good duets," he said.

"I don't know. Sometimes you get so impatient. With me. With yourself even."

"So I'm impatient. That's just how I am. That doesn't mean I'm angry with you. It's just that I know how it should sound and sometimes we fall short."

They laughed together and he took her hand. "Alice, I like when we're together." And then she knew he was about to say it, although exactly how she knew she couldn't explain. Except maybe that his hand was trembling a little. "Alice, I think we're so good together we should be together permanently."

She said nothing. She just found his hazel eyes through the reflection of the lamplight in his glasses. Was he proposing a professional alliance or something else? Alice could hear Momma rattling the tea things in the kitchen. Not now, Momma, she thought.

"Alice," he whispered, "I'm asking you to marry me."

Just then, what else? Momma came in. She smiled and placed in front of them on the small table, the hot tea, served Eastern European style in tall glasses. "I couldn't remember if you take two or three lumps, Isadore, so I brought a bowl for you to do your own," she said, wiping her eyes with her apron.

"Thank you very much Mrs. Friedenthal," Izzy said, letting go of Alice's hand.

Momma left the room and Alice took two lumps of sugar from the bowl, dropped it into her glass of tea and stirred. Izzy took one lump.

"So what do you think?" he said.

"I think you should have more sugar."

He grimaced. "That's not what I meant, smartie. You know. About what I just asked."

"What exactly did you ask?"

"You're not going to make this easy for me." Smiling, he got down on one knee. "My beautiful Alice," he said in an overly flamboyant way that was his sense of humor, "Will you do me the honor of becoming my wife?"

"For an answer to that," she said slowly, "first you have to ask my father."

"Does that mean yes? Yes if your father approves?"

"Yes," she said, laughing as he hugged her. "Yes."

Poppa, to no one's surprise, approved. He had been telling Alice to marry Izzy Gold since their first date—an event arranged by Tanta Sarie, Momma's older sister, who had read the tea leaves and predicted Alice would be marrying soon. Tanta Sarie had met Izzy when he was playing at her next door neighbor's cousin's wedding. She asked Izzy if he would like to meet her niece, a pianist, and maybe they could play duets. He had agreed and Alice—she hadn't had any choice. Momma said she had to meet him even though she was dating Josh Weinmann. What did Momma care? She didn't like Josh Weinmann. Josh got Alice home too late and then he didn't call for a month, Momma said. She didn't know what Alice saw in him and Alice couldn't tell her about those long kisses downstairs in the hallway.

Momma had been right of course. But Alice hadn't realized it at first. For a couple of months Izzy came over on Sunday evenings and they would make music, nothing more. Until one Sunday night Momma invited him to dinner first. That very night, after they finished the Schumann, he asked her to go to the movies with him the next Saturday. It had been two weeks

decided, why not? After that, four Saturday nights in a row in the afternoon and they played tennis in the park before dinner and duets after. Then, the fifth Saturday night, she discovered that Josh had nothing over Izzy when it came to kissing.

Izzy gave Alice a diamond ring though she didn't know how he could afford it. The diamond was only a quarter carat, but still a diamond. They kept company for six months before getting married in a wedding on a sunny April afternoon and though the wedding was not extremely large, it wasn't tiny either. They had all the friends and family they wanted, and Estelle, her friend since childhood, was her matron of honor.

Alice let Izzy touch her breasts after he gave her the engagement ring. But she made him wait until their wedding night to make love. For their honeymoon, they went to see the cherry blossoms in Washington. She was glad, as she lay next to him the morning after their first night in the honeymoon suite overlooking the Potomac River, that they had waited. It made their wedding night special. And if she did not yet completely share his passion, she trusted that Momma would turn out to be right again and that those feelings would come with time.

They moved in with her folks, into her bedroom, because Izzy wasn't yet making enough money for them to afford a place of their own. Poppa wanted Izzy to come with him into his dressmaking business which was doing very well, but Izzy declined. "Thanks, Pop, he said. "But I need to be my own man, you understand."

"Sure, sure," Poppa chuckled, nodding his head. "Back in the old country the son-in-law would go into business with the father, but here it's different."

Izzy couldn't make enough money with his music, so he took a job in sales in the furniture department at Macy's.

Alice continued studying piano with Mr. King, her teacher of many years. Poppa offered to continue paying for the lessons even though she was married, but Alice told him she was now earning enough from her own piano students to pay for the lessons. Even after paying for her own lessons, she had some money left over that she put into her and Izzy's joint bank account. She was proud to have found a way to have an income without working outside the home, which, as everyone knew, wasn't proper for a married lady.

None of her married friends worked, and she had to admit that she was jealous because they all seemed better off than she was. Estelle had married a man whose family owned a jewelry business, and they had an apartment of their own on 182nd Street. Gertie, another high school friend, had married a medical student and though they still lived with his parents, that wouldn't last long after he finished his internship. And her cousin Becky, Tanta Sarie's daughter, had married a lawyer 10 years older than herself and had moved with him to a large house on Long Island.

But Alice could wait. As Momma had predicted, she had begun to share Izzy's passion and was happy with him. He made her laugh in and out of bed.

Besides money, there was only one problem in their marriage—the very thing that had brought them together—their music-making. Every time they played duets he got very impatient with her. While they were courting, she thought that once they got used to each other's ways he wouldn't get so angry when she seemed to lose her place, or when her rhythm was a little off. But after they married it got worse. She would make just one little mistake and he would be off ranting and raving: "No, no, Alice. It's a B flat there, not a B natural."

Then one Sunday afternoon they had their worst argument. They were doing Mozart and she just couldn't seem to get the rhythm quite right. "God dammit Alice, that's a quarter followed by a sixteenth not a eighth," he screamed, pounding out the rhythm on the top of the piano.

she shouted back at him.
“Then, you?” he spit out, and whirling around, placed his
front back in its case and stomped out of the apartment, slamming the door so loud that
Momma came out of the kitchen into the vestibule.

Alice, still at the piano, started sobbing and Momma came into the living room, wiping
her eyes with her apron. She sat down beside Alice on the piano bench and put her arm around
her.

“Don’t worry,” Momma said. “It will be all right. Your father Abie and me used to have
fights when we first got married. But now, no more. So your Izzy, I know he is a good boy. He
will come back and apologize.”

“But Momma. What can I do? I’m trying my best and he just gets so angry at me at even
a little mistake.”

“So maybe you shouldn’t play music together anymore. You can still share your music.
Just maybe for now, don’t do it together.”

In a couple of hours Izzy came back with Poppa. He made believe nothing was wrong and
told about how he had watched while in the park Poppa beat three men at checkers.

But as Alice and Izzy got ready for bed that night, Alice still felt their argument hanging
heavily over them. “Izzy, can we talk about what happened earlier?” she asked.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry, honey,” he said, unbuttoning his shirt. “That’s just how I am. I get
angry easy. I know how the music should sound and it gets me mad when it’s not that way.”

“I guess I’m just not good enough,” she said, bowing her head, not wanting to get
undressed.

He came over and lifted her chin, looking into her eyes. “No, you are good. When you
play the piano by yourself you’re marvelous. It’s just when we play together, I think you get
nervous.”

“That’s because I know you’re going to get angry.”

He sighed and shrugged his shoulders. “What should we do?”

“How about if we don’t play duets for a while. We can just listen to each other play
separately, but we won’t play together.”

“Okay. We can try that. If that’s what you want.”

“Yes. It is.”

“And what else do you want?” he said, grinning playfully and beginning to unbutton her
blouse.

“Izzy, no—”

“You still angry? You know I love you. I love you very much, Alice.”

“No. I’m not angry, that’s not why.”

“Why then,” he said, loosening her skirt.

“I have my period,” she whispered.

“You know I don’t mind that,” he said, nuzzling her ear. “In fact, that means we don’t
have to use anything and I can really feel you.”

He kissed her then, and they fell together onto the bed. Afterwards Izzy said, “That’s a
duet we play together perfectly.”

Six weeks later she discovered she was expecting. When she asked Dr. Feldstein if she
could have gotten pregnant that night he shrugged and said he didn’t know, but it was best to
use the “prophylactic” all the time, even when she had her period.

After getting over the shock, Alice felt happy to be carrying Izzy’s child. And Izzy, though
surprised, was not upset.

“We’ll be all right,” he said, “Macy’s promised me a raise after Christmas.”



expectations were the rumors that the United States might
hope and the fear that the German anti-semitism might
spread. They asked each other if this was the kind of world to bring a child into. They never
came up with an answer.

Alice's doubts were swept away by a tranquility that grew as her pregnancy progressed.
She never had morning sickness, not even for one minute, and had happily entered her sixth
month when it happened.

Izzy fell ill. He had come home from work one night with a high fever and a cough.

The doctor sat on the edge of their bed and listened to Izzy's chest. He said Izzy had
influenza and that it would be over in a couple of weeks. A week later, Momma and Poppa
caught it. Alice had her hands full taking care of them, but she never got it. Her parents
recovered pretty quick. But Izzy, who insisted on going to work after 3 days even though he still
had a fever, just kept getting worse.

Finally Alice felt she had to put her foot down. Or more accurately, she put her 7 months'
pregnant body in front of their bedroom door. "Izzy, you're not going into work today," she told
him. "You're going to the doctor to see why you still have that cough and the fever."

"I'm all right, Alice. I'll be fine." He coughed for a long time before he could get himself
to stop. "It's just taking a little longer for me to get over it."

She stood firmly in front of their door. He tried to get around her, but she moved so he
couldn't. Then he used his secret weapon—he tickled her under the arms.

"Stop it, Izzy, you're going to send me into premature labor," she said, angry at not being
able to stop laughing.

But already he had gotten past her and was unlatching the front door. She lumbered
after him as he went into the hall. When she reached him, there he was, collapsed in front of the
elevator.

"Izzy!" she cried, bending over him as best she could.

"I'm okay," he said, reaching up to take her hand. "I just got a little weak for a minute."

"Come back in the apartment," she said, pulling him up.

By that time, Poppa had come out into the hallway. "What's the commotion?" he asked.

"Izzy's not feeling good, but he refuses to stay home."

"Izzy, you come back in the apartment," Poppa said sternly. "You won't do Alice or the
baby any good dead! I'll get Momma to call the doctor. *Rechela!*" he called out to Momma as he
rushed back to the apartment.

Izzy obeyed Poppa. That afternoon, Alice went with him to the doctor's office. After the
chest x-ray, the doctor told Izzy to go home and stay in bed, he had pneumonia.

And in bed Izzy stayed for two weeks, with the doctor coming over to check on him once
a week. Even after the doctor allowed him out of bed, he forbid him to go to work for another
two weeks. Luckily Macy's didn't fire him, but they only paid him for one week while he was sick.

The week Izzy was finally well enough to go back to work, Alice started allowing herself
to daydream about the baby although, in keeping with Jewish custom, they could not buy
anything for the baby before it was born. What she did do, though, was to get Momma and
Poppa's help, while Izzy was at work Saturday morning, rearranging the bedroom so there
would be a place to put the bassinet. Alice knew she still had about two weeks until the due date,
but despite everything she somehow felt full of energy, and wanted to get everything in place.

The next day, for a special Sunday dinner to celebrate Izzy's first full week back at work,
Momma made their favorite: stewed chicken with carrots and creamed corn. Alice had eaten her
fill, especially of the creamed corn, which she had become even more fond of during her
pregnancy. Feeling like she had to go to the bathroom, she pushed herself up from the table.
Suddenly a stream of water began flowing out of her and onto the kitchen's black and white

l to a high sheen. At first she thought she was peeing, but
Your water broke, her mother called as Alice rushed towards the bathroom, nauseous
for the first time in her pregnancy. She made it just in time to bend over the toilet bowl and
vomit the creamed corn and chicken in a lumpy mess.

Izzy was behind her saying, "You all right?"

"Yes," she said, flushing the toilet and going over to the sink to rinse out her mouth.
Actually she wasn't so sure, but she didn't want him to know. The baby wasn't due for two weeks
yet. Was it all right for this to happen now?

Momma came into the bathroom and hugged Alice. "Don't worry," she said. "That's how
it was with me when you were born. No labor pains until my water broke."

"I still don't have any pains."

"Good. Good. I called the cab. You got your bag packed?"

"No. I didn't think it was time yet," Alice started shivering.

"Cold?" Izzy said, "I'll get you a sweater." Actually Alice wasn't cold. She didn't know
what she was. But now her teeth were chattering.

"Don't worry about the bag. I'll pack it and bring it later," Momma said as she
uncharacteristically took charge of the situation. "You go with Izzy to the hospital now. The cab
will be there by the time you get downstairs."

Izzy wrapped Alice's maroon sweater around her shoulders, but she kept on shivering
anyway. "Let's go," he said, putting his arm around her. "Let's go have a baby."

By the time the Yellow Cab had taken them the 10 blocks to the hospital, Alice was
having pains—deep down pains in her lower back, like right before she got her period. She had
expected it to be a lot worse.

They whisked her away from Izzy and into a partitioned area in the emergency room
where a nurse helped her undress and guided her onto a stretcher. Then she was wheeled
through many corridors into the labor room. Another nurse came and shaved her and gave her
an enema, but Alice hardly paid any attention. By then the contractions felt like very bad
menstrual cramps and she was gritting her teeth. They put belts around her hands and a young
doctor she didn't know stuck his hand into her vagina, but she but she tried not to think about it.
"It's time," he said and the nurse placed a mask on Alice's face and prepared a needle. Then, on
the wave of an immense contraction, everything went blank.

"Mrs. Gold, how are you?"

Alice could hear the voice but somehow she was too far away to answer. It kept
repeating, "Mrs. Gold, how are you feeling?"

It was a woman's voice. Though the haze Alice could see the white uniform of a nurse.
"How are you feeling?" the nurse said yet again. To get the nurse shut up, Alice said, "Okay."
Then she asked for her baby.

"You have a beautiful baby girl," the nurse said, and Alice could hear loud crying.

"Where is she?"

"I'll get her."

Alice must have drifted off because she again heard the nurse's voice call her. With a
strong conscious effort, Alice opened her eyes and focused. The nurse was holding a baby—a
fuzzy baby.

"She has to go to the nursery now," the nurse said. "She's had a very big day and needs to
rest."

"I want to hold her," Alice said. She tried to stretch out her arms but they were too heavy.

esthesia,” the nurse said, taking Alice’s baby away. “You’ll have many years to hold her. Take advantage of the peace and quiet and just rest.”

But Alice didn’t want to rest. The baby had come early and Alice had to make sure she was okay. Yet Alice found herself drifting back into sleep. As she drifted she heard a baby’s cry. She floated up from the bed, floated in the direction of the cry, but when she got there, there was no baby. Just the sound of crying, loud crying.

When Alice woke up again she was in a regular hospital room. Izzy was sitting on a chair by the window.

“Did you see her?” she asked him.

He came over to the bed, kissed her forehead, and took her hand. But he didn’t answer her question.

“Why aren’t you answering me?” she asked, frightened.

“I couldn’t make out what you said, you were mumbling, honey.” He kissed her lightly on the lips.

“The baby, have you seen her?”

“Yes. They pointed her out in the nursery.”

“I want to name her Beth. After my grandmother, Bess, she should rest in peace. I never met her. She died in the old country when I was a child.”

“Beth is a nice name,” Izzy said.

“So how does she look to you?”

“Well, frankly, I’m not completely sure which one they were pointing to behind the nursery window. They have them all close together in there. They pointed to one, but I think they made a mistake.”

Alice was more concerned than ever now, but before she could question Izzy further, Dr. Feldstein came in.

“Congratulations, Mr. Gold,” he said, shaking Izzy’s hand. “You have a healthy baby girl.” He turned to Alice. “How’s the little *mamale* doing?”

“Fine,” she said. “How’s my baby?”

“She’s just fine. They’ll be bringing her in in a few minutes. You’ve seen her in the nursery haven’t you Mr. Gold?”

“I’m not sure. They pointed one baby out but it had hair all over—it looked like a monkey! I’m sure that can’t be mine, doctor!”

Dr. Feldstein threw his head back and laughed. When he caught his breath, he said, “She has a little fuzz because she came out a couple of weeks early, that’s all. The fuzz will fall off before she leaves the hospital. She’ll be ready for a beauty contest by the time you take her home. She’ll be the prettiest little girl a father could ever want, you’ll see.”

But though Izzy shook the doctor’s hand again and smiled, Alice could tell he wasn’t satisfied, and her fear stayed.

The nurse came in and chased Izzy out because they were bringing the baby. Alice was so excited she could hardly concentrate on the doctor as he instructed her: “When they bring the baby you can suckle her for a few minutes. You won’t be producing any milk yet, just colostrum. When you start nursing you’ll be on a four hour schedule, even if the baby cries before the four hours are up. Otherwise you’ll end up with a spoiled baby, and you don’t want that, do you?”

The doctor left and the nurse brought in Alice’s daughter. She was wrapped in a pink blanket. The nurse waited for Alice to open her nightgown and then placed the baby in Alice’s arms.

“I’ll leave you alone with her for a few minutes, now,” the nurse said. “If you need anything use the call button.”

ed anything, but she noticed where the call button was. Then she checked the pink and white bracelet on the baby's hairy little arm. The black letters on the beads spelled out "Gold." Anxiously, she peered into the baby's face. True, there was a little hair there and, peeking, she saw hair also covered the fingers, toes, extending to the arms and legs. But the baby felt so warm in her arms. Eyes tightly shut, the child was starting to cry now, one fist trembling towards Alice. So Alice offered her breast to her daughter, Beth.

Just as the doctor promised, by the time they took Beth home at the end of a week, she had shed the excess hair. In a few weeks the baby's real hair began to grow in, and, to Alice's surprise it was red.

"No one in my family has red hair," Alice remarked to Izzy.

"I had red hair when I was a kid," Izzy said. "Curly red hair." He laughed and picked Beth up, running his fingers gently through her few strands.

The first thing Izzy did when he came home from work those early summer evenings was take Beth out for a walk in the carriage that Momma and Poppa had given them. On Sunday afternoons he took her to the park and she would nap in the carriage while he sat on the bench doing the *Times* crossword puzzle. Then he would take her down to the checker tables and he would watch Poppa play while all Poppa's cronies remarked over "Abie and Rechela's beautiful granddaughter with the red hair."

Alice treasured her Sunday afternoons without the baby because it was the only time she could practice the piano without having to worry that Beth might wake up and start crying. Alice had given up teaching in her ninth month and probably would not resume because taking care of the baby drained all her energy. Poppa insisted on paying so she could continue taking lessons with Mr. King and Izzy didn't object.

Mr. King came to the house every Tuesday afternoon, during Beth's nap time, and although Alice was glad she could continue Beethoven, Bach, Liszt, Chopin, and all the others under his tutelage, she enjoyed even more his anecdotes of acquaintances who were performing in recitals, or with orchestras. Mr. King, whose first name was Raymond, and whose father was full-blooded Cherokee and mother an Irish immigrant, had, in his youth, given a recital at Steinway Hall. But he said he hadn't been able to keep up the pace of a concert pianist and had decided to pursue the quieter life of a teacher. In his 40s now, his hair beginning to silver, Alice thought him still a gallant figure and continued to wonder why such a handsome man had never married. He seemed content, though, with his life of teaching students at their homes. He said his home was "too modest" for him to teach students there and it wasn't a bad idea for the students to take lessons on the instrument they practiced on.

But sometimes even a piano lesson could not lift from Alice the weariness she often had after Beth's birth. She felt most of her tiredness came from hearing Beth cry and not being allowed to feed her. That aggravated Izzy too.

"I can't stand listening to her cry," he would say. And he would go in and look at Beth in her bassinet, her face all scrunched up and red, her little fists flailing the air.

Many times Alice would get there just in time, just as he was about to pick the baby up. She would place her hands on his arms and say, "Don't Izzy. You know what the doctor said. You'll spoil her!"

"Better spoil her than drive me nuts with that crying!" He'd leave the room shaking his head, but without picking Beth up.

Momma didn't like following the doctor's orders either. "Babies don't cry for nothing. Beth needs something. She's hungry. Why don't you feed her more often, Alice?"

“No. That’s the latest science. Psychology. They found when they cry, they get spoiled.”
“Spoiled, summoned. I picked you up. I fed you when you were hungry and you turned out okay.”

One time, when Alice was practicing Chopin and not paying attention to what was going on, after Beth had been crying a few minutes Momma tiptoed into the bedroom, picked the baby up, and carried her into the living room. Alice wouldn’t have noticed them there, so absorbed had she become in the music, but Beth started crying again, even though Momma was holding her.

Alice whirled around on the piano bench. “Momma! What are you doing!”

“I want you to feed her, Alice. She’s so hungry. She’s such a tiny thing. How could it hurt?”

Alice ached an ache that began in her breasts and continued to her heart. She loved feeding Beth. She loved the feeling as she relaxed while the baby sucked. And she loved the look of satisfaction that Beth got in her eyes before she drifted off to sleep, still sucking. She wanted to reach out and take the baby from Momma and give Beth her breast. But didn’t the doctors know best? Shouldn’t she take advantage of the latest science?

“Just this once,” Momma whispered, holding Beth out to her.

Alice took her daughter and held her to her clothed breast. The baby had already started making a sucking sound. But Alice couldn’t go against medical advice. Quickly she carried the baby away from her mother, went into the bedroom and placed her back in her bassinet where, exhausted from crying, Beth slept until Alice awakened her for the four o’clock feeding.

As Beth grew plumper, she cried less. “See,” Alice told Izzy, “the baby learned to eat on schedule.” By Thanksgiving, Beth was sleeping through the night, Alice had more energy, and her life also took on a regularity that she hadn’t known since before she was married. Izzy had begun to work late evenings as part of the Christmas season and was bringing home a bigger paycheck. They started talking about maybe finding an apartment of their own.

When Alice told her folks about their discussions Momma just wiped her eyes a lot, but Poppa, peering over his Yiddish paper, said he wasn’t so sure that it was a good idea for them to start looking now.

“Wait a few months. See what happens in Europe,” he said, pointing to Yiddish headlines that Alice had never mastered skill enough to read.

Poppa talked of little else but the situation in Europe. Some of his family was still there—in Poland—and he was worried. After he got home from work at the clothing factory, he was either pouring over his newspapers or listening to radio news reports. “They’re killing Jews over there,” he would say, shaking his head. “This country won’t be able to stay out of it. And then our Izzy may have to go.”

That scared Alice. But she told herself it hadn’t happened yet and might not. And she so wanted an apartment that just she and Izzy—and now Beth—would share.

But it turned out that Poppa, as usual, was right. Only a few days into December, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and the US went to war. So Izzy and Alice stayed put, waiting for the inevitable draft notice. That winter, one by one, Alice’s girlfriends and cousins called to tell her that their husbands had either volunteered or been drafted.

“Maybe I should volunteer,” Izzy said one early spring night as, walking in the part of the park overlooking the Hudson, they took turns pushing Beth’s stroller. “I despise Hitler as much as anyone, God knows. I want to fight him.”

Although Alice hated Hitler too, she hated more the thought of Izzy going away from her. “No, Izzy, don’t. Beth and I, we need you with us as long as possible.”

d get it over with. I'd serve my time and then we could go

Or you could get killed," she said, shocked at her own bluntness.

"I won't get killed. I promise. I'll come back to you. To you and Beth," he said, picking Beth out of the stroller and lifting her overhead. "I have to come back to my monkey face, right?"

Beth giggled and kicked her legs in the air.

"You can't promise things like that, Izzy. Don't promise me promises you can't keep,"

"But I hate waiting. It wouldn't be so bad, Alice. Maybe they'll put me in the army band and I'll tour the world."

"Violins don't play in bands," Alice pointed out. "You'll probably end up in the infantry. Please don't volunteer, Izzy. Promise you won't."

He put Beth back in the stroller and turned to her, his face serious. "Okay. I'll wait. For now. But I feel silly. All my friends are going."

"Then be silly," she said. "Silly and alive."

She extracted from him a promise that he would wait three months before volunteering. It was an uneasy three months. Izzy would sit every night with Poppa, listening to the radio and then discussing the war news. Things were getting worse. There were reports in the Jewish newspapers of Jews being rounded up in the big cities and shipped off to camps.

"If we don't stop them in Europe, it could happen here," Izzy said, sitting across from Poppa at the kitchen table.

"Right," Poppa nodded, sipping his tea through a sugar cube.

"The three months are up tomorrow," Izzy said, turning to Alice. "I've kept my promise. But tomorrow I go down and volunteer."

Izzy didn't wait for any reply from Alice. He simply got up from the table and went into the living room, got out his violin and started playing Debussy.

Alice didn't give him any argument. But in bed, after they made love without speaking, she lay awake all night in fear.

The next day she tried to occupy her mind first with taking care of Beth, who had started to walk. Then, while the baby was napping, Alice worked very diligently on a Czerny étude. But she wasn't able to concentrate and was glad when Beth awoke.

She took the child in the stroller to the park. A late summer day, she could feel the coolness of fall in the air. As she pushed Beth along the walk that overlooked the river, she marveled at the sun sparkling in the water. How could all that killing, all that hate, be going on in a world that looked so calm and beautiful? She pushed the stroller away from the river, past the granite rocks where children played Cowboys and Indians, towards the swings and the sandbox. When she reached the sandbox, she lifted Beth out of the stroller and onto the sand. The child took a few steps and then bounced down on her bottom. She started piling sand in front of her and remained involved in that activity for several minutes while Alice watched her, wondering what was going on in that baby mind and how it would be to take care of her without Izzy. After several minutes she called to the baby, "Come walk to me, Beth."

After looking around uncertainly, Beth got up, took two steps and then sat down again.

"Come on, Beth, 'it's time to go home.'"

Beth got up again and toddled unsteadily over to Alice.

"That's a good girl," Alice said, settling her in the stroller once more.

When they got home, Izzy was back. Alice lifted Beth out of the stroller and held the baby to her as she went into the kitchen where he sat drinking *schnapps* with Poppa.

"I'm sorry, Pop, I tried," Izzy was saying.



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It's not your fault. When I left the old country, men would
get drafted. They let the youngest son stay home, so all of a
sudden there were a lot of youngest sons."

"What happened?" Alice asked Izzy.

"They wouldn't take me." Izzy frowned.

"Why?" she asked, trying not to show her happiness.

"They took a chest x-ray and they said I have a shadow on my lung the size of a half-dollar."

"Oh my God," Alice said, sitting down, hugging Beth to her.

"They asked me if I had had any lung problems and when I told them I had pneumonia a little over a year ago, they said it was probably scar tissue and that it was nothing to worry about. But that they couldn't take me in the army. I'm classified 4-F."

"You tried," Alice said. "You tried." And she carried Beth into the living room where Momma was sitting, dabbing at her eyes with a hanky. Smiling, Alice placed the baby in her mother's lap. Then she sat down at the piano and played a Mozart minuet, wondering if now she and Izzy would get to move to a place of their own.

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Judith Laura is also the award-winning author of the novel, *Beyond All Desiring*, and three other books. *Three Part Invention* is available through Amazon.com, bn.com, and many other online booksellers, as well as through brick and mortar stores. For more information, including reviews, links to online book sellers, and other excerpts, see <http://judithlaura.com/3PI.html>