

I was constantly moving to different homes, one foster home after another. Sometimes I was sent back to the agency, but from most of the foster homes, I just ran away. Now I was back in the agency after they had caught me running away. Waiting for another foster home to be sent to was always sure to be frustrating and darn painful. I dreaded going to a new home, and I tried not to imagine how much I would loathe the new people. I rarely told Ella, the main agent that took care of me about why I would run away from all the different foster homes. Ella was nice, but somehow I knew that she would never be able to understand. All I knew was that she had named me Melody when she had found me by a violin case when I was a baby. The violin brand was Melody, so Ella ended up naming the baby girl, Melody.

As I grew older and needed a larger violin, Ella would exchange my old violin for a cheap dilapidated violin that fit me at the music shop. Though the violin was creaky, I was grateful that I had one. Now I owned a full size scratched up violin in a hard charcoal black violin case. I had an innate ability for music, and was quite a competent musician. Actually, I taught myself to play the violin. In my early years of foster homes, many folks had sent me back to the agency because of music. I remembered hearing them talking to Ella, "She is way too noisy, banging pots, tapping the table during supper. It's like she is making an orchestra, creating a rackety, loud, and antagonizing noise all the time. Also, not to mention the trouble part..." Than they would shiver, like I was a horrible monster. Even when I thought I had found a home, everything would turn upside down with one mistake. That would usually mean no going back.

My handwriting was terrible, all cramped and even I could barely read it. I was almost always on the bad list of the teachers. But I was always prepared for anything. Well, almost anything mainly specialized for running away emergencies. In the zipper pocket of my violin case was my emergency storage. It had my secret stash of money; so far I only had 10 dollars, some stale pieces of candies, and other nifty little trinkets. My dream would never come true. I was sure it would never happen. I waited for someone to break the icy truth to me, and say, "Well Melody, it seems like no one wants you. You just don't belong here. The only true friend you ever had turned out to be a traitor, she was disguised as your best friend, hiding her face behind a mask. You'll never have a family, and you know it. You're just trouble." But no one did, and somehow, despite everything, I wanted to believe that there was a family waiting to welcome me, somewhere that I could fit in. The only comfort I had was music and hope. That was why each violin that I had was special. Each music piece that I played was seared in my mind. Every music piece had a different personality. I even made up my own music pieces, which mainly were about my hurt and my longing for a family. So far, music was the only thing that could make me smile. Even Ella said the same thing, and that I never really smiled fully as a toddler, until I started playing violin. Especially when I

am sad, there are some feelings that are hard to explain. Music expresses all those things that I cannot put into words, but which are impossible to keep to myself. It just bursts forth, and I keep creating more and more songs, each seared into my memory. I hope I remember them forever, I better.

After a couple weeks, Ella told me there was a new chance for a family. "Yeah, right," I muttered, soft enough so Ella couldn't hear. "Like I would even be welcome or I'll just make another stupid mistake." "You'll be with a couple and their son, the Marotta family. I heard that they have instruments," hinted Ella, obviously thinking this family to be a perfect match. I tried to hide my surprise, but it was conspicuous and Ella saw it. "I am totally sure that you'll settle right in, and you will meet them next week," said Ella firmly.

A week had passed, and I was ready to meet this family. I clasped my violin case, pulling it closer to me as the car approached a neighborhood. Being carsick for 7 hours was not fun at all, having nothing to do except think about the future. Then I saw it, a pale blue bricked house, all those luscious green trees in the front, flowers blossomed, everything in color. Melody, I told myself, you are not going to make a mistake here. You just can't risk leaving this beautiful house. My hands became sweaty, and I fidgeted, hoping the Marotta's would like me. The white door to the pale blue house swung open, and I saw the couple with their son, all smiling. They always do this, all smiling and pretending, than they betray you, my mind told me. But I didn't want to believe it, and I wanted to know that I still had a chance to have a family, so I smiled timidly back. The car pulled out from the driveway, and drove away. Then the mother invited me in and said, "Hi, my name is Cathy, this is George," she said, pointing to her husband, "and this is Henry," said Cathy pointing to her son who waved at me, maybe a couple years older than I was. To my surprise I started to love their family instantly. I wanted to throw my arms around Cathy, begging her to let me stay, but it would be too awkward. I didn't want to ruin my chance with them, if it was even possible for me to stay. "Can you guess what I just baked for you?" asked Cathy. I sniffed the air, and oh boy, did it smell good, but I didn't know what it was. I rarely got treats or desserts and never home baked stuff. So I just shrugged, wondering what Cathy must have baked. "Chocolate Banana Bread," she said slowly, but I could hear the excitement in her voice, "made especially for you, as a welcoming to our family."

On the round table were four loafs of bread, two of them had dark chocolate chips, and the other two had white chocolate chips. Henry ushered me to a wooden chair, and Cathy started slicing the bread. She laid one thick slice of dark chocolate banana bread, and one moist white chocolate banana bread on my plate. "Eat as much as you want, and if you want some butter, we can get some from the fridge," said Henry happily, shooting a wink at me. "Oh, stop making excuses for the butter," said George, slightly annoyed. "You know how unhealthy it is." "Oh, okay," grumbled Henry, obviously caught in the act, but I

could see the mirth in his eyes. His blue eyes seemed to sparkle with mischief. "But today is a special day, so it won't hurt to spread a little bit of butter on the bread," said Cathy, emphasizing the word "little", while taking out the butter from the fridge. A smile formed on Henry's face, hope was being kindled for him. Cathy handed the butter and spreading knife to me, but I didn't know what to do. I had never had butter with bread, so I had no idea how to spread the butter. Henry turned towards me, and seeing my beseeching eyes, asking for help, he said, "Here, I'll teach you how to spread it, since I reckon you don't know how to." "I'd be careful of how much he's going to spread on your bread," said George, laughing. I watched Henry spread the butter, drowning my dark chocolate slice of banana bread in butter. "That's quite enough, Henry," said George, afraid that Henry had just ruined my slice of bread. I laughed, then Henry handed the knife to me, and I tried spreading the white chocolate slice of banana bread. Chunky globs of butter landed on my piece of bread, and when I had finished spreading, I set it on my plate next to the slice that Henry had spread for me. I passed the butter to Henry, and I compared the two slices of bread on my plate. Mine was much more inundated by the butter, then Henry's. We all burst out laughing. "Henry sure taught you how to spread butter on bread," said George after the laughter started to abate. I felt like everyone was watching me as I was about to take my first bite. I was surprised that the bread was delectable! It just melted in my mouth, and it tasted just as good as it smelled. The butter was so good, and now I knew why Henry had pressed for it. "Do you like it?" asked Cathy, with a hopeful face. I replied, "Better than anything I have ever tasted before," which was true. In the next minute, I had devoured both slices of bread, and was starting to take another slice of banana bread. Henry looked at me, grinning. "I bet I can eat more slices of bread than you," he taunted. "Try me," I replied, trying to sound equally haughty. After a long time, eating Cathy's bread, there was only one slice left. Henry eyed me warily, and I gave him a quick glance. We were tied, and we were both staring at the last piece. Both Henry and I reached for it. Then I pulled my hand back at the last second. Henry stopped in his tracks. He was skeptical at first, then since I didn't reach for the bread he took it. "Who won?" asked Cathy coming back from the kitchen. "They were tied, but Henry won by one," said George who had watched the entire race, and gave a recount of what happened. I looked at Henry who mouthed thank you to me from across the table. No problem I thought. Anyway, I was getting exhausted from stuffing my face, even though I was still ravenous.

"Here is your room," said Cathy, showing me a room painted light blue, with music notes floating across the walls. "We painted it just for you, and Ella told us that your favorite color was blue, and that you liked music. Also, heads up that we don't have a phone," said Cathy. I took a breath, so astonished. A room of my own, and best of all, it was customized to my liking! I managed to stammer a couple grateful words,

than sauntered in the room, setting down my luggage. Cathy closed the door and left, leaving me to myself. I finished unpacking, and exhausted, I flung myself on the downy blue bed. I could see the music notes just swimming in my head, not believing that this was happening, but it was. There was even a corner for me to practice playing violin, a music stand, tuner, metronome, and all those fancy stuff. This was too good to be true, so I decided to practice on my violin while I still had the chance. I heard a knock on the door. "Come in," I said, just a tad reluctantly. It was Henry. "Oh, hi Henry, are you full from all that bread?" I said. "I just came to tell you that if you ever run out of music books to practice from, you can borrow mine," he said, obviously impressed. Henry then led me to the main music room, with a library in it. Pointing to the right side of the bookshelves, Henry said, "This has all the music books, and the left side has all other kind of books. You are welcome to come here whenever you want, and take any books you want." My eyes roamed the whole expansion. "Maybe tomorrow I'll show you the river," said Henry. "You'll love it."

A week went by, and Henry got Cathy's consent to show me the river. I was so excited I could hardly wait. When we reached the river, I was mesmerized by the rhythm of the water, rushing by. "But you haven't seen the best part yet," said Henry, nudging me along, breaking the spell. I followed him, and I heard a roaring noise growing louder. Then I saw it, it was a rapid. The water was violently tossing around the rocks, creating frothy white air bubbles. This was a place where I could shout my deepest fears and worries, all which no one could hear. I started to like the rapids despite the torrent waters, a place of solitary. On the other side beyond the rapids not to far, was a large hill, desolate. If I used one of the planks from the garage, I could probably reach the other side. "Pa doesn't like me coming here. He thinks it's too dangerous and I might slip or something, but it enchants me. Pa says too many people have died here. "Am I allowed here?" I asked, sure that if George didn't let Henry, he would forbid it for me as well. "Well, not really. You're not supposed to know that it's even here, but you can keep it a secret, right?" said Henry, turning around, those deep blue eyes pleading at me. I shook my head up and down.

I loved reading books with quotes and lectures in them. There were always connections to my life. I started to read on my bed. "Just remember when times get tough, that there is always a way out. For even at night, there is always the light shingling from the stars, the light guiding you back to safety." But then a quote struck me before I went to sleep. "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams. -Eleanor Roosevelt" I dreamed that I was part of the Marotta family, and as weeks passed, I actually started to believe it. There was a saying about if you believe than you will find your way.

It was winter now, the longest I had ever stayed with any family. I was given so much latitude, and I felt like the Marotta's were my family. Henry was a brother, and Cathy and George were parents to me.

They actually wanted me to be a part of their family, and it made me feel special. Cathy had told me she had always wanted a daughter, and she used too. Her name was Elizabeth, older than Henry, but she died of leukemia. Now I was like her daughter. I had once told her of all the trouble I caused for the other foster homes because I couldn't restrain myself. She hugged me tight saying, "You can be all the trouble you want, but I'll still love you Melody. I'll have double the trouble, or even more, but we will always love you, remember that." I thought Cathy would have coiled away, but I was wrong. Maybe she had experienced it with Henry. Since Henry loved music too, he taught me violin techniques, and I learned how to play other instruments. But best of all, on my birthday he gave me a brand new violin. It was new! I gave him the biggest hug I had ever given anyone. Tears welled up in my eyes, and I would have started bawling, but the cake came out, homemade so I couldn't cry. It would ruin everything if I cried, so I didn't.

It was spring now, and I was certain that I was secured deep into the roots of the Marotta family. One day though, it was stormy and cloudy outside, rain falling like rocks from the sky. I went into the music room, and the first thing that caught my eye was the antique violin, on a table. Cathy and George were quite stringent about Henry and me touching it. In fact, they said it was better if none of us touched it. It was priceless, a wedding gift to Cathy and George from an old friend. No one was around, and I was tempted to play the lovely violin, but I tried to resist my hand from grabbing it. As the tension grew in my arm, in a swift movement I unwittingly hit the violin off the table. I heard a sickening crack and a twang of a broken string, as the violin wrathfully hit the floor. No, this could not be happening, and I started to cry. Cathy and George rushed in, and asked me what was wrong. Then they saw the broken violin, aghast. "Oh my gosh," George whispered slowly, and picked up the violin, and strode out of the room. Cathy patted me on the back telling me it was alright, understanding that it was an accident. But the tears kept flowing, I was sure everyone would be so mad at me. Cathy told me to go to my room until dinner and relax while she talked with Aunt Sal who had just arrived. Henry tried to cheer me up but it was useless, so he finally left me alone in my room. Then I heard Aunt Sal in the kitchen say, "You should get rid of that girl before you get attached to her. There was a boy like her once, and he burned down the entire house while the family was sleeping. A tragedy it was, and all she is going to do is cause trouble." "Shhhhh, Melody is upstairs," said Cathy as she escorted Aunt Sal out the door. The next moment I was covering my ears with my clammy hands. Cathy started yelling at Aunt Sal, than George was bellowing from the kitchen, and Aunt Sal started shouting back at Cathy. I had never ever heard them yell before, and it was terrifying. I was sure that that I would be sent back to the agency the next day. How could I have been so careless? I was down hearted, had let the Marotta family down, and probably ruined the last chance for a family. When no one was looking, I secretly

went by myself to the forbidden rapids, to run away. I packed 4 bananas and 4 turkey and cheese sandwiches in a plastic Ziploc bag, which I stashed in my violin case. Also, I brought a large wooden plank that I could drag along to the rapids. I couldn't face George and Cathy again. I soon found myself staring at the devious rapids, the white water rising and falling in a rage. So I sat down under the spread of a mammoth tree, eating a banana and sandwich for dinner. Then I set the banana peel next to the empty Ziploc bags laid out around me on the wet mossy ground. When I had finished, I used the plank to get across the rapids, to the lonely hill. I slung my violin onto my back, and tightened the straps sharply. The hill seemed to embrace me, as I wriggled across the plank, trying not to look down. I could hear the lion roaring beneath me, ready to swallow me and tear me apart if I swayed even the slightest bit. My heart raced, and water sprayed on my face, blinding me. As I pushed myself off the plank to the other side I stumbled, my foot hit the plank, sending it spinning down into the rapids. I watched as the river took over, never subsiding, banging the plank against the hardy rocks. I shivered in the gloomy night, but the moon was still shining bright. The moonlight was like music, uplifting me, but not enough. I wanted to fall asleep in that soft downy bed at the Marotta's house, but I didn't dare go back. I reached the top of the hill, and shouted down to the rapids, raging violently as though they knew how I was feeling. "I am Melody, and I know I won't ever have a family. I ruin every family, and I'm a magnet to trouble. I whisper a soft goodbye which gets smothered by the loud and beautiful waves. I start to walk away from the rapids until a voice startles me. "Melody, is that you?" I hear a voice shout, but it sounds faint. I momentarily look over my shoulder to see Henry on the other side. Then he's running, he slips, and I hear a groan. I stifle a scream, terrified, and take off running somewhere far away from home as darkness falls. Henry must have slipped on my dinner that I left on the ground. I think I had seen him tumble towards the rapids. The last I saw him was falling, his blue eyes glinting in the moonlight, searching for me desperately. Then my steps faltered, hesitating, wanting to go back and help Henry. But no, I couldn't go back so I took a short respite to say a prayer and dashed off as I heard Cathy and George running towards the rapids.

Tears were dribbling down my face, but I wiped them away. I found a hotel, and the lady at the main desk looked at me queerly. "Your room is room 111," she said handing me a key card. I sighed, Henry's favorite number was 1 and I was staying in room 111. I tried to forget about the Marotta's, but I couldn't, so I played my violin. When I was lonely or afraid, music was my refuge. I could crawl into the space between the notes I played, and turn my back away from loneliness. That was my secret. It was a place all to me, where I belonged. I dreamed and wished that I could still be in the Marotta family, and it

seems like it never will, but his voice says, "Why not?" It was Henry's voice, playing in my mind. Slowly I soothe myself as I drift to sleep, like clouds floating away. The dreams flowed, shining through the dark.

In the morning, I go where they are serving breakfast in the hotel. I throw away my old food since they got squashed in my violin case. I take a banana and glass of milk as I skim through the newspaper. I couldn't find anything interesting, except a notice about me missing. I'm going to faint, aghast at what I'm reading even though there are only a couple sentences about it. The title says, "Boy Dies, From Falling into the Rapids," and I'm proof positive that they are talking about Henry. "I'm so sorry," I whisper, on the verge of crying. Not only had I broken their priceless violin, but I had torn apart their family. I had probably crushed Cathy and George's heart, and I was accountable. Eating the banana reminded me of Cathy. I ask for a plastic bag, and I toss in muffins, bread, donuts, etc. for my long journey to nowhere. Then I'm off on an adventure running away from the agency again.

I went into a bakery shop since I was all out of food. A tall man with a white chef hat asked me if he could help me with anything. "I'd like 4 rolls of sourdough bread, and 3 bottles of water," I reply. He puts my order in a bag. "That will be 15 dollars," he said. I checked the pocket of my violin case, and I realized that I had used up all of the money. My eyes shut, wondering whether I should turn myself in to the agency or not. I think the man sort of knew what I was thinking and took pity. He said, "I'll give you food if you will deliver some bread. Then come back, and I'll give you twice as much food." "Fine with me," I said as he gave me a slip of paper with the address, a map, and a bag full of bread. "Also, get a signature from either George or Cathy on this slip of paper as verification," said the man, as I went out the door. I stopped abruptly. Did he just say George and Cathy? Could this just be another coincidence? I was going to go back in and turn down the offer, but I remembered the agency. So I continued my long trek to George and Cathy's house.

When I reached the house, I was sure it was the Marotta family. The same pale blue bricked house, but I just couldn't face them, so I took a pencil from my violin case and wrote on the slip of paper, "Please sign your name (George or Cathy) and leave on the ground. This is the bakery delivery." Then I set the bag of bread and the note on the ground next to the door, and rang the bell. I went to the back of the house and lied down on the hammock next to the screen door. Oh, the life I could have had with them. My eyelids drooped, but I was awoken by the sound of someone sobbing, Cathy. She must be crying for Henry, I thought. I felt really bad. Then I heard her talk to George in between her sobs saying, "I wish Melody stayed, and I hope she will come back. She was such a joy and now we've lost her. I've lost two daughters now." She was talking about me? She missed me? What about Henry? You always loved him, I

thought. George replied in a deep voice, "I don't want to force her in this family, it's up to her." I got up and waited for someone to pick up the bread. Then I took the note with Cathy's trembling signature on it to the bakery. By then it was late at night, and the store was closed, so I put the note near the door. The moon was hidden in the clouds, and I couldn't see in the dark very well. I wasn't sure what to do, everything seemed obscure. Then when I looked into the sky, it was full of stars. They reminded me that when things get tough, that there is always a way out and it gave me hope. So in the dark night, there was the light shingling from the stars, and the light slowly led me back to the pale blue bricked house. There I slumped into the hammock.

I barely opened my eyes, but it was morning alright. Then I sniffed the air, and the smell was vaguely familiar. Was that chocolate banana bread? The only time Cathy made it was to welcome someone home, or on special occasions. I hadn't had it in such a long time, and it seemed like eternity. My mouth started watering, my stomach growling. Why had she made it? I slightly opened the screen door and peeped in, trying to take a look at the house and figure out why they had made chocolate banana bread. Then a familiar voice said, "Came back for some more chocolate banana bread?" Was I imagining things? Right in front of me was Henry, well and alive, and I just stood gawking at him, my mouth open. "This is not a figment of your imagination, you know?" said Henry, his sky blue eyes laughing. Cathy and George came in laughing too, and after Cathy hugged me, she said sternly, "You worried us so much! Just remember that we will always love you. We sort of fixed the violin, and that's not a big deal." "But the newspaper said Henry died, and I thought that you were going to send me back to the agency," I stuttered, remembering the argument. "Of course not, honey. We were going to adopt you, and the papers are basically done, but it's up to you. Henry is fine, just a broken arm though," said Cathy smiling, and to emphasize the point, Henry tried to raise his cast. "They got the story wrong in the newspaper, I didn't die," said Henry. "But, why did you bake chocolate banana bread? What's the special event?" I said, puzzled. George laughed heartily and said, "When we saw the note with the bread, we knew you were near. Your handwriting is very distinct, and we recognized it instantly. We made it to welcome you back to our family, if you wish." "I would love to," I said dreamily, "but are you sure you can handle me?" "More than happy to have you in our family," said Cathy, as everyone sat around the table slicing the thick chocolate bread. This was a dream come true.

That night I picked a book, and snuggled in my cozy bed. I started reading it, trying to absorb the words before Cathy and George tucked me in. Right before they came in I read a quote "Happiness often sneaks in through a door you didn't know you left open. -John Barrymore" When George and Cathy came in I knew this was where I belonged. "Goodnight mom and dad," I said for the first time in my life. Cathy

glanced at George and a smile slowly formed. When I woke up the next morning I had a new name, Melody Marotta.