

FROM *MARSHALL ARMS* CHAPTER ONE "THE FIDDLE"

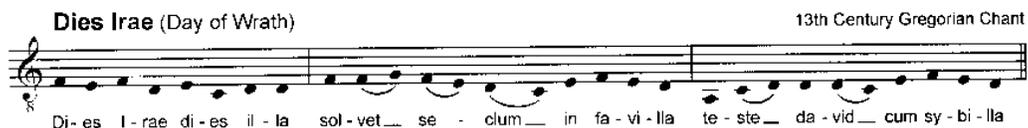
In the middle of my seventh year, I found myself one nice summery night on the (to me) vast greensward of Kansas City's Swope Park. A summer orchestra, which means not the very best, was playing some symphony for the crowd lying on blankets or sitting in beach chairs to enjoy the night air. For some reason I suddenly rose and flopped my little arms up and down, imitating the conductor. "Look, Bob," my mother said to my father, "he's a concert violinist."

And so I was born again.

In an eye's blink Dorothy had witnessed my conducting mimicry and, by some trope that as an adult I can now name (*metonymy: substituting what's adjacent for the thing to be made figural*), had assigned me not to the first, let alone the second violins, but to an invisible place onstage, where a great concert violinist would have stood, but did not stand due to the miniscularity of the orchestra. Assuming the ancient patriarch's role, mother had swooped up my little self and forthwith delivered me to another matriarch, one Elsie Vaughn, a violin teacher and lover in a Kansas City conservatory. Who, not wealthy, soon saw what she wanted to see and after some months offered to teach the boy for life for free.

But soon thereafter the project failed. Recognizing her inadequacy for a boy of such parts and through a kind of clout long forgotten by me, made the referral to one Raymond Cerf, Professor of Music at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, the most noted violin teacher in our area.

Cerf had been the student of the corpulent, black-haired and magnificent turn-of-the-last-century Belgian concert violinist Eugène Ysaÿe, whose unaccompanied Second Sonata, *Obsession*, is one of the most revered, difficult and heart-rending of modernist compositions. Hearing it makes one aware of the scratching of a fingernail on a blackboard. Monstrous. Ysaÿe had founded his *Obsession* on the famous Gregorian chant *Dies Irae* (*Day of Wrath*):



When I first met Cerf, whose name in French means 'deer', I marveled at his rendering of the Ysaÿe, crying a little too generously to the *rubato* as he sang it out, his voice his accompanist. He stopped his performance for one, and clasping me on the shoulder, said, "The first time, it happens to us all," then resumed the yearning, desperate search for the

universal. And then I tapped the little fiddle to mimic his brio of staccato as the recital ended. By which time, neither of the emotions made me ashamed in the generosity of his chamber.

After class, on the return trip, I would try to tell my father (who generously got off work at 2:30 to drive me to Lawrence), try to tell him what had transpired, the singing, the martelé I had just learned, try to sing him this or that phrase I remembered from the lesson. No response. Silence was in the car. And the boy I was could not understand why.

Maybe the deer knew, maybe he didn't, but he enabled me, with the aid of my father, to run away, not take classes, from Central High School in KC. For how many years I do not know, but I was hated for not being even the minimalist of athletes (in gym, I couldn't climb rope, the legs not strong enough, the rope burning the hands as ten, twenty clasped their way upwards—nor indeed, did my mother let me stay in gym long; fear was, I would hurt my hands (already hurt by rope) at sports). I suppose you could have called me—although the word did not yet exist—a nerd. I scarcely did anything except practice the violin night after night in my little bedroom (homework somehow did itself), modeling my playing on the records I spun: of Menuhin, Oistrakh, Millstein, Heifetz, the greats of the era. It was an escape route sent from God, in whom I believed then. And, one other flight line: every week, on, I think, Friday, before Sabbath, studying Talmud from Rabbi Maurice Solomon, the scholarly leader of the Orthodox congregation into which I was born. My Hebrew was fluent and we would read a passage, I enunciating and he nodding his head at my pronunciation; and then together interpret the Talmudic interpretation. Philosophy, Solomon told me once was the imagination of the relations between and among relations. I didn't know, really, what it meant at the time, but I think it had something to do with my becoming, much later, a semiotician, studying the Saussurian sign as a relation of differences (glance right). A sheep is not mutton; well, then, what is mutton? Mutton is not a sheep. "It is impossible to recognize a sign without at one and the same time classifying it among its competitors" (Todorov, see sidebar). From Solomon to semiotics.

Well, shouldn't it have been obvious? A boy of the mind and not of the body, a ten-year-old bedroom-cloistered creature listening to Russian Jewish violinists, a 1950's America, *Middle Western* America, in which in Jewish homes one whispered "*anti-semitism*"—of course I became known as The Brain, which, stupidly, I took as a compliment...until one afternoon I was chased by the, we would say today...jocks, all the way home: to them I was Kafka's bug in the bedroom, although they did not know and would have hated him, if they had: a Jew bug! In that time, high school was unified, there was no diversity of population or thought. High school was absolute and macho.

A sign is "strictly conditioned by the relationships uniting it with the other signs of the language, so that it cannot be grasped without being reinserted in a network of intra-linguistic relationships" (Ducrot/Todorov, Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language (1979). I used to teach the concept using a single sentence: "I went to Montreal to buy Cuban cigars."

I told the students: "Now, every word in that signifying chain takes the place of other words I could have chosen, but did not. Instead of the pronoun 'I', I could have said, 'Blonsky,' 'Your humble servant,' etc. Instead of "went," I could have been more precise and said 'flew,' 'took Air Canada,' 'skied my way' (if I wanted to be pretentious). I didn't have to say 'Montreal,' I could have said 'Canada' 'our neighbor with a more tolerant attitude towards Fidel' etc. I could have said 'Montecristos,' 'Romeo y Julliettas,' whatever.

What you hear, per Saussure, is 'He didn't say "Air Canada," he didn't say "flew" ... what you hear is the negation, 'not not not'; you hear what the linguistics maestro called "negative difference."

The chase of the bug happened so often that my mother had to pick me up at Central High, drive me home. But the dear mother, now the second chauffeur in my life, couldn't always treat me so royally and, one day, walking, then running, falling, running faster: it was the Big Boys again. My father had through all this instructed me to be a man (this, before feminism), to stand up for myself, and I do remember, in front of 3233 Park Avenue, a lower middle class home, *my* home (my father was a bank employee), finding by accident a beam with a nail in it; turning to face the lead Boy; banging once hugely on his forehead with the architectural beam out of whose topmost part came a nail, very large. I think I killed this Boy.

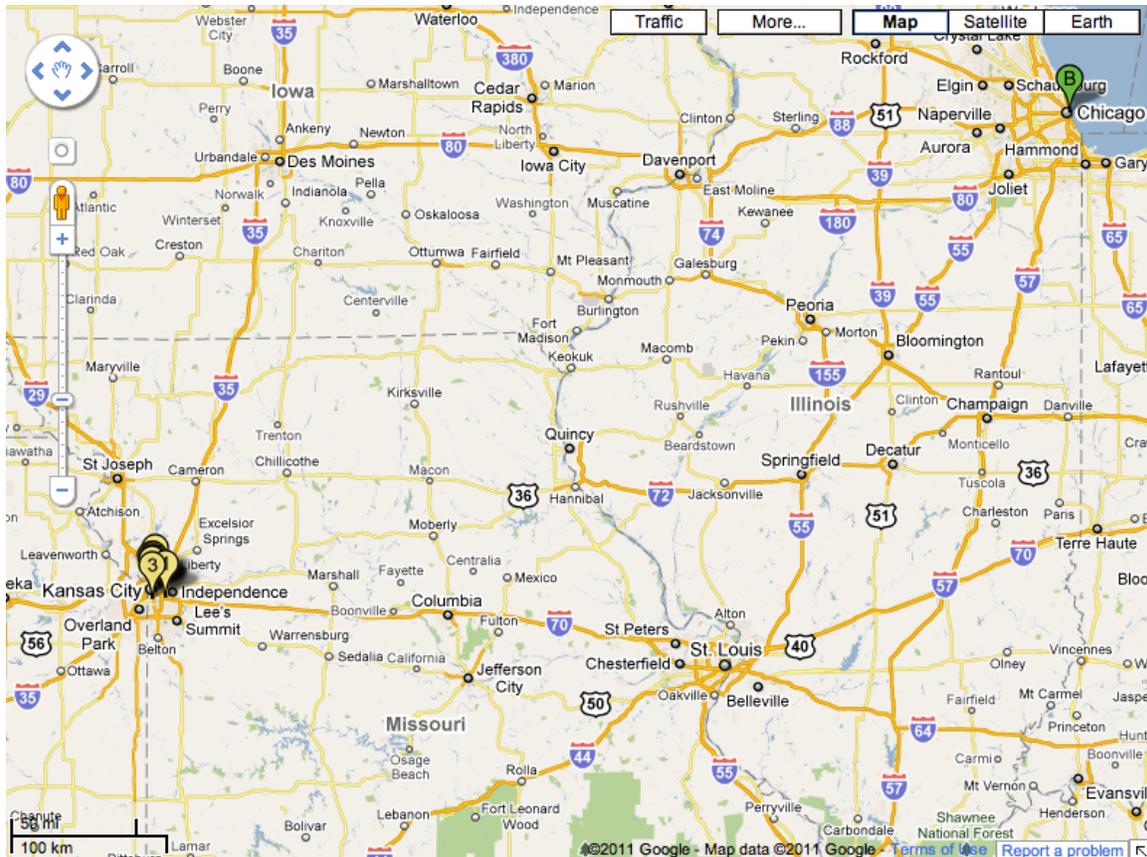
There was much discussion between the parents and men I did not know. Have I yet told you my relation to the Kansas City Mafia? It wasn't my doing, it was my mother's.

Twice.

The first. My uncle Eli ("Ever so much handsomer than you," my mother used to say) was a 27-year-old Master of Ceremonies, leader of the band and featured singer (*Stormy Weather, Smoke Gets In Your Eyes*, the crooner stuff) at a major nightclub in the "gritty days" of Kansas City. "Grit" because of the loose jazz, *louche* chorines, unforgiving pimps, bootlegged liquor, concealed weapons that didn't bother police and oh, those "swanky" suits on the men, right down to the cloying boutonnières in the jacket pockets. The Mafia days.

Eli brought Hollywood acts to the club, was himself said to be "on his way to Hollywood." The club he MC^d at was named Hades' Hideaway. It was, my mother tells me, not just a Mafia-owned *joint*, but a hub for Mafia "made men" going to ground (after a heist, a kidnapping or a killing) and coming from St. Louis, Springfield, Evansville, Terre Haute, even as far away as Chicago. I was then six months of age, and of course never heard Eli's singing and patter.

I think the alliteration was too "ain't that sweet" by a half, but that was exactly the point. To hide the sleaze inside and make Mr. Kansas Citian say to the Mrs., "How cute! Let's bring the kids, honey. That Eli what's his name, I hear he can make you cry." Great for Sante: here was yet another revenue stream. The yokels forking over their wads so they could feel glamorous.



Kansas City, '30s/'40s: the jazziest jazz, jazz in other sense (ejaculation = sex = prostitution), anything goes gangsterism, Mob rules all, City Hall = nothing. No wonder Mafia from all over Midwest came to water.

Nor was he ashamed of his Judaism. My mother remembers the “happiest day of my life,” the day her star-looking, black-haired brother sang to *her* mother, Ida, “My Yiddishe Mama”—sang it *in Yiddish*. “My heart fell out of my body,” my mother told me. “And then Eli urged her to the stage, and introduced her to all, saying in a resounding tenor, “*My alte Yiddishe Mama!*”, wrapping his arms around her for all he was worth! And yet again!

Let no one think, ‘How schmaltzy!’ Those were the days following revelation of the Nazi death camps, and Eli’s singing the song was a “thumb in the eye” of Nazi (and Kansas City) anti-semitism. “He was brave,” my mother said. He was also an Olympian-trained swimmer.

The Yid he was notwithstanding, my uncle was so popular that one Sante Fosco, owner (on the books) of Hades’, used to invite Eli to dine with him at his personal table. That was my uncle’s death warrant, because also at the table were less admiring Mafiosi. “Eli heard too much,” my mother shocked me in the year 1988, “and that was why he died.”

Most certainly Sante didn't know it, bur 'Fosco' is medieval Italian with affinity for the French word 'louche,' shady. Who knows, he might have liked that etymology, although he would have had to question—or slug—you for using a 'fancy pants' word he didn't know.

“Died?!”

One balmy Sunday afternoon, Fosco invited Eli to go sailing with him, along with two men in their ‘50s, upon whom Eli had never set eyes. The boat set off on whatever the lake was, and not much more than two hours later, reappeared—this time with a waterlogged Fosco & co. On the beach, my mother heard Fosco say: “We capsized. The guys couldn’t swim. Your brother, an Olympian swimmer, bless his heart, dove without a thought about it, and rescued one of the guys. But there was another. So he dove again. And there, popping out of the water was Sal alive (even in ’88 I began despising that Sicilian name, *Salvatore*) **but no Eli!** “Dot, Bob [my mother’s and father’s given names], we even used the long pole with the nail on the end we had onboard. Dot, one hour we trolled and still no Eli. [Fosco now weeping] **He was so brave, Dot. He drowned helping others!**”

Whereupon my mother, no fool she, ran to Fosco and beat and beat and beat on his chest, crying “**Liar, murderer! Eli was a great swimmer—it’s you Fosco who threw him off the boat, held him down ‘til he drowned!**” Good for her! But Bob didn’t admire her bravery, not one little bit. He pulled her off Balls’ chest, whispering, my mother told me, “*He’s a capo, do you know what that is? He’ll kill you!*”

“**Fuck you, Sante,**” I would have said had I been a bit older than six months. Through my watery eyes, my closed ears, in ’88, upon first hearing the story, I could barely hear my mother saying *whilst weeping*, “No police, no prosecutor, no lawyer, *nothing!* *And that’s why you’re alive, Marshall!*”

No, mother. May he be damned *and all his progeny*, whether “respectable” lousy little lawyers, or “cutesy” girlies in ribbons waiting for communion, may they drown, these cutsie-pie girls in the baptismal, may they be, all of them, burning in Hades. Unto eternity.

The second. My mother was a stage mother, and could not resist any invitation for Marshalla to play at an event, no matter how miniscule. I don’t know his name anymore, but every Independence Day, KC’s Don threw a splendid—more than splendid, a gargantuan—barbecue for business associates, the KC baseball team (they were then a AAA farm club of the Yankees), the basketball giants, politicians, including KC’s mayor, even the ordinary citizenry of Kansas City. Some aide, my mother later told me, must have brought my name up to the Don. “The Yiddle with the fiddle,” Dot told me she overheard at the barbecue. Even then I think I had heard whispers about Eli: I knew, I am sure, what I was getting into. It was a hot July 4, I knew enough *not* to play for this killer, told my mother that, Dot overruling me. So there I was sweating in the sun, placed only partially under a canopy, playing some awful shit for these shitty guineas, and *my left hand’s fingers slipped on the fiddle’s fingerboard.* Dot was mortified, the audience (mostly munching, not hearing) cared not a wit, the Don ditto, and when, under mother’s wrathful eye, I rediscovered my fingering, all was hurrahs and God bless the boy.

Do you know the psychoanalytic term “abreaction”? It takes place when a trauma happens and you don’t immediately react, you don’t let your affects out. Think of 9/11—how many in this country, spiteful of Manhattan, watching the thing on television, *didn’t give a damn!* After all, to the people in the Bible Belt, the target was *Jew* York City (even if they didn’t know they were stealing from Ollie Stone’s *Nixon*). Their affects—not even spiteful—never were released. What happens to you in that event? Well, as we all know, the repressed *always returns*. And those emotionless luggards of Midwest and Southland will bear—for sure—the repressed trauma all their lives. Not expressing their affectual psyche, living in repression five, ten, fifteen years, what do you think will happen to them? The repressed returns, I said, and no less with these lumpen. They’ll present somatic symptoms, personality disorders, the *anything* that can happen when what’s “inside” isn’t let “out.” Good! Manhattanites, tired of being called *Jew city*, fornicators, blow sniffers, smack imbibers, will return the favor and as it were cry out *Leave them to their cancers! Let their strokes be plentiful!*

Well, as to me, I think the Yid fiddler at the Don’s barbecue did *not* abreact. I think he blew his top under the guise of losing command of his fingerboard. To this adult day, into a home where dinner’s spaghetti *and meatballs*, where people punch you in the stomach when they talk. No siree, Bob!

Back to my yiddle with a nail. Why did the affair blow away? I think Dot (not Bob, who was timid) had accumulated capital with the KC Mafia. I think it was the “made men” who helped “push the thing underground.”

Good for me! is all I can say. About time, my misery at hands of Mafia were repaid!

All I knew, or sensed, at the time of the nailing was soft discussion between the parents and dago strangers visiting our home (I was, even then, as curseful a person as I am now), arrangements being made, all of it only in my vaguest earshot. I heard signifiers, but thankfully forgot them in the after-lust of my first Grand Aggression.

My triumph, like all things mortal, couldn’t last.

Came the day my father raised a belt to my head. In those days there was patriarchy, the father supposed to know all and in return who wanted absolute power over his domestic socius. But the boy’s burgeoning profession was degrading his authority, removing the wife from him. Because many a night I would enter my mother and father’s bedroom, my mother alone resting from her labors of the day on the bed; excitedly I would play for her my newest legato, violinistic vibrato, always the one I would never play for Cerf and had taught myself. It was *Eli, Eli*, Jesus Christ’s lament on the cross—you might call it schmaltz, but she loved it and *I* loved her. The up bows, especially, brought small tears to her eyes. And I was unaware (and still today do not believe in) the phallic meaning of that encounter (bow effecting liquidity). I am sure none of us had such a silly thought. But, because we were piccolissimi, our house shared a driveway with the adjacent house and now it was 11 p.m. and the summer air carried Christ’s lament...very simply, across

the drive into the ears of our workingman neighbor. He shouted: “If you don’t shut him up, *I will!*” From nowhere the Voice of a New Patriarch (in those days, the ‘50s, “patriarch” was a novelty, not the rusted cliché it is today).

Again, he shouted it and again I played on—because music like language is a narrative with its own laws. “IF YOU DON’T SHUT HIM UP, *I WILL!*” And suddenly, the bedroom door burst open and there was my father, unlacing his belt. The “you,” he had interpreted referenced *him*. And caused him to become on the instant a patriarch, a Prompt Patriarch. “STOP, STOP, STOP, STOP!” from father. And of course I did and of course there was no beating. Nor were there thanks from the unseeable man on the other side of the driveway. Was it two patriarchs in tandem? Was the Unseeable (like God) a patriarch standing and beating upon the shoulder’s of a first patriarch?

No matter today. I take away from the incident only this: how precocious to be uttering ‘patriarch’ some twenty-five years before all the hoop-la!

Fast forward the years ten through thirteen, through ever-enlarging violins and bows, through lessons in the Vitalli *Chaconne*, Beethoven’s *Romanza*, the Bach Unaccompanied, Bach Double Concerto (Cerf as my double) and maybe forty of the canon, successfully taught...until I reached...you guessed it: Ysaÿe. *I couldn’t*. I had plateaued and soon Raymond Cerf had an Idea. I would go with him to the Meadowmount School of Music in the Adirondack’s—run by the world’s greatest violin teacher at the time, Ivan Galamian. Legendary. And why should he let me in with the world’s greatest young talent? I will never know. But Cerf arranged it. *Both* of us would study from Galamian. And so it came to pass that I took a few trains and joined Cerf in Elizabethtown.

And was astonished. Master lessons, a notetaker in the window seat (always, for every student); twenty sets of young ears peeled to the curtained French doors as Colombian discovery, Jaime Laredo, played Ysaÿe, tenderly, passionately, Galamian once shouting the rhythm; ten of the happy few standing on a little hill playing the Bach Double Concerto (no pianist as the double), as if a single giant fiddle were trying to ascend alone its calls to God; waking to hear Leonard Rose practicing solo cello before breakfast; Galamian at night, speaking Russian, patrolling the grounds with the boxers Mischa and Bébé, on the hunt for fornicators (sex and violinism were antipathetic, he insisted...to no one’s appreciation); Turkish Aïla Anderand (who knew how old?) dressed by her mother in flouncy dresses, blond hair in pigtailed, her cheeks so over-rouged she looked like a clown—her mother’s invention to make her *look ten*; Eric Friedman grandstanding at quartet practice, getting a slap in the face from teacher Joseph Gingold (concert master of the Cleveland), a slap as boisterous as Erick’s domination of the G string (Erick subsequently died, a suicide); Erick’s mother occupying two lawn chairs at outdoor recitals, her girth requiring them; and me, watching, practicing patiently in my room, darkened to make the session more dramatic, preparing for my next lesson by the light of a single bulb over the music stand—listening not only to the large music I, imitator of Friedman, sought to make, but to mother (now with me here) in the next room discussing my sexuality with Mel Ritter, a journeyman orchestral violinist. “Keep him from it as

long as you can,” Mel told her. “There’s no going back once you...” and hearing “start” saddened me at the sacrifice *that I would make to become a concert violinist!*

By now, you know that Dot was a ferocious stage mother. Shall I count the ways all over again? Getting me to the Chicago Symphony (I think I won a prize with her aid; then losing the musical thread, the orchestra stopping, the effect of a GP (Grand Pause), in this case not orchestrally dramatic; rather, personally traumatic. Then, somewhere in Kansas, some sonata in an unairconditioned hall, playing, suddenly forgetting the next passage, having to stop, speak to the audience (the great musical taboo offended), telling the lie that the muggy weather had messed up the player’s finger work. And, colossally, at my age ten, talking our way into the dressing room of one Jascha Heifetz, in KC for a concert. In fact, we were forty minutes or so from his eight o’clock entrance onstage. You see, my mother’s mother, Ida, had said to my mother that Ms. Ida was related to Maestro Heifetz—why? Because both had come from Vilnius (then part of Russia), where, Ida told mother, all his relatives had lived. This, my mother told Heifetz on the telephone—“Yes! Your grandfather!...that’s right! In Vilna!...well, my...yes, that’s right!...was my great-grandmother’s”—and that is how we two got in, the young star and manager/mother. But Dorothy hadn’t been able to remember the first name of her great-grandmother in Vilnius; so when we entered the dressing room the lapsus annoyed the maestro—

—who was *very* annoying. His face, I remember, was livid, matching his honeycomb concert shirt. In those days of course we hadn’t computers, and, besides, I had not done my research on him. But I could sense his strangely waspish retirement. Later (too much later) I would read that in 1939, a year after I was born, he told a critic: “Born in Russia, first lessons at three, debut in Russia at seven, debut in America in 1917. That’s all there is to say, really. About two lines.” The artist repudiating reason as a lower order. As he had repudiated his two wives, bitter divorces. *Debut at seven?:* that was *my* debut—in the imaginary of an orchestral conductor, promoted by mother to a soloist to the side of the conductor!

Wait a minute. That’s *not* how I’ve remembered things all my adult life. It was the *warmer* Isaac Stern in that green room I’ve always recalled. Recalled the handkerchief over his chinrest (not to callous himself). The hair untamable vectored in this, now that, now that other direction—never an attempt to comb it down. But I suddenly realize my memory of Stern had all along been repressing the actual critic of me, Jascha Heifetz. And only now, *hic et nunc*, have I for some reason I shall never know broken the idol of my dear Isaac to come face to face with the cold monster who made my life hell. Jascha Heifetz.

—the lapsus annoying the maestro, who said, “I cannot listen to the boy, it’s almost stage time.” He was dressed in black tie, his jacket hanging from a walnut valet. I noticed how crisp under his chin his bow tie was and the green sofa and easy chairs in the room. There was another man in the room with him, annoyed looking also. But mother and I would have nothing of their pique and, please note, I had *prepared* for the encounter; the *Czardas* by V. Monti (a piece later to become famous when Montovani (who?) recorded

it with an all-string orchestra). It (need I say, an encore for a second- or better third-tier concert performer) called for the encorist to hop up the fingerboard like a rabbit running across a field. I had to play harmonics that, as the boy practiced it, made him think of factory workers whistling their way home after dark. There were passages of spiccato that made peasants, in shoes with pointed toes, dance across his mind. And quadruple stopping that previously had brought tears to his mother (sitting on the bed in his room, listening) and a sensation of traveling across the world and tack back to the ten-year-old. All in all, he thought, it was a bravura piece admirably suited to showing the master his several talents. “No doubt *of it*,” the mother assured the boy, “when Heifetz hears—“

It was a strange procession outside the door with the little star...the female fist, raised to strike again, followed by the mother who belonged to it (orangey red of hair and someone had drawn a single red crayon line across the face to signify the mouth)...the arm of the fist covered in Persian lamb, coming out of it the nail-bitten hand...the boy, then, attached to the apparatus...and behind *him*, holding *his* hand tightly with its small plastic handle, the violin case, held behind the boy’s back as if to protect the occupant (protected already by a diaper) from the fury behind the door that was opening...

Maestro Heifetz said curtly, “What will you play?” and when the boy told him, Heifetz said, “Well...” and then “uh” and then: “Would you first play—let us warm up—one faultless scale in A major.” In A major...an open and honest scale...without caviling flats...calling for the fingers to broadly stride up the fingerboard, like the steps of men without guilt...a scale of the beef stews they ate, made of lean and large cubes of meat, a scale without pathos and perfectly suited for this lad of ten who liked to think of working men whistling.

I had wanted to ask if the assistant or whoever he was could leave us alone, but the person was tapping on his watch and I didn’t dare. Stupefied (stupidly, I hadn’t practiced my scales and arpeggios), I tried—*do-re-mi-fa*—and suddenly Maestro gestured with his golden Strad *stop*. “That was not a perfect A-scale.”

Heifetz said, “Well—again,” Little Mister Ten drawing the *do* in the form of a sustained slow bow, and next thing the boy knew, he was in the corridor hearing mother talk about the fine *Czardas*, by V. Monti the boy—

“Yes...well, perhaps anoth—“

—and then all three of them were in the corridor, Heifetz saying “GOODbye,” and mother petitioning for a rehearing the next time he came through.

Such was my story before Galamian heard my Monti and Vitalli. The choice, you see, was the following. And requires saying that Galamian, upon first hearing me play in that summer of thirteen, told Cerf that he would need another summer at Meadowmount to take a decision. Which? To accept me either at Juilliard or Curtis as master pupil. In that interval, in the winter in Kansas City, waiting for the second summer to come, a junior in a high school I barely attended, I was visited (the Superintendent of Schools,

whom my mother lobbied, arranged it), first by recruiters from Harvard—“You’re not a Harvard man, Mr. Blonsky,” they told me at interview’s end; and a month later by Yale recruiters to whom I very shortly said: “You’re not going to want me. Harvard was here already and they told me I’m not a Harvard man.”

“Why don’t you let us be the judge of that,” one of the recruiters said. “Besides, we’re assessing you as a Yale man.”

And Yale man I was designated; early admission Ford Scholar. I had no idea (nor would I have cared) that diversity was beginning, that the recruiters had a Jewish quota to fill. I was, I think, ecstatic. I had insurance.

But little did I know that Yale insurance policy would turn out to mean nothing to me. For (it was summer now, my fifteenth year) and I was taking my lesson with Galamian when afterward, as I sat on this very different greensward, next to a huge old oak tree, who should approach me—“May I sit down with you?—but Cerf himself.

What he told me made me cry. And do things I never dreamt I would.

I could not remember his exact words, but luckily he wrote my mother immediately, in hand, in a green ink, and this is what he wrote, which is not what I was supposed to see and which I liberated from my household (it sits on my Roland Barthes shelf where *I* sit and write this, on a Saarinen table, oval top on oval bottom, highest-quality carrara, discrete gray veining, the substitute for what I wanted once—to be a standing person, a solo performer in front of the community of cellos, double basses, oboes, tympani, my mother’s dream for me:

Austin’s
Cobble Mountain Lodge
ON WATER STREET
IN THE ADIRONDACKS

ELIZABETH TOWN Tel. 195 NEW
YORK

23 July, 1955-

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Blonsky,

I had an opportunity yesterday to have a few minutes of conversation with Mr. Galamian and I discussed Marshall with him.

This is the gist of his opinion:

He believes that Marshall’s chief asset as a violinist is his terrific ability to work and that quality is an all-important one to Mr. G.

He does not think that Marshall should pursue an all-out career as a concert violinist because there would be no chance of success.

He bases that opinion mostly on his belief that Marshall does not have that extra little undefinable spark of musical gift.

He also feels that Marshall is not far enough along for his age.

Therefore, he feels very strongly that Marshall should go to college and make his college work come first. Mr. G. is willing to continue working with Marshall because he is interested in him. When I suggested a lesson every two weeks, Mr. Galamian said he thought perhaps a lesson a month might be better, but that in any case, that could be worked out after Marshall has begun his work at Yale and they know how busy he will be.

Mr. Galamian's opinion is exactly what I have felt all along, as you know.

No one told *me*.

This conversation took place before Marshall's lesson and after the lesson I had a long talk with Marshall. I had not intended to mention all this to M. but when he said that he was anxious to know Mr. G.'s opinion, I thought I had better tell him. Naturally, it was a great shock to Marshall, who does not quite realize, I am afraid, that it takes much more than hard work and perseverance to become a great violinist. I did all I could to alleviate the shock by telling him, for instance, how lucky he was to be gifted in other fields also, etc. etc.

I am happy to say that Marshall looks very well and is in perfect health.

Please excuse the inadequacy of this letter. It is written hurriedly between practice sessions and, besides, covers a subject rather difficult to express in black and white.

Hope you are all well.

With best regards,

Sincerely,

Raymond Cerf

In my amnesia, I do remember one thing Cerf told me Galamian told him. “Don’t encourage him to join me at Juilliard. Let him go to Yale and join the ruling class. Do you want him in an orchestra the rest of his life?”

I was left alone. And I also remember this other thing: grabbing my arms as best I could around the trunk of the oak tree and praying to God (for I was then religious): “Please, God, return me to my seven-year-old body with my fifteen-year-old head so I can have the brains I have now and the flexibility for technique I didn’t have then. I promise that I will...” I forget what. I had also forgotten that technique was the *second* of Galamian’s negative conclusions. I forgot that I didn’t have to spark to be an immortal. An immortal—that is what Galamian wanted from us. So there, weighing on me as I waited for God to respond, was an entire stack, a Ziggurat of patriarchs: there was the patriarch in form of matriarch, mother; there was the prompt patriarch, father, who stood up to the bat when required; there was the deer above him; and above the deer’s antlers, the Grand Patriarch, Mr. G.... and you know what *that* stands for. What a tower pressing on a basement. Impossible not to be a bug.

And since the bug sat and waited for God to send him back, *aand*...nothing, I went to...