

# *THE VIOLIN*

Hal Ames



When I was a boy, I met a most interesting man. He lived a simple life, and he lived alone.

His name was Park, Young Woo. He was a kind old man who loved to talk about many things. He would talk to people about almost anything, and he would make it very fun and interesting. People would just sit and listen to his stories.

It was 1953 and the war had just ended when I met him. The army from the north had invaded our country and many people were hungry and tired. Yet Park, Young Woo was always happy and he helped to cheer up the people around him. Fortunately, it was now summer, and the sun was shining every day.

He lived in a small house built of pieces of wood, cardboard, and metal he had found along the road. Most of his house was made of cardboard. He cut small windows in the walls of his box to let in a little light. On the top, he put the pieces of metal to keep out the rain. It was only one room, but it was big enough for him and his dog.

Most of the time, he sat in front of his house with his dog lying beside him. He offered to repair shoes as people walked by. In a small wooden shoebox, he had some thread, pieces of leather, colored polish, and glue.

If a person left their shoes with him in the morning, they were repaired and ready in the evening. People always said he did a wonderful job.

Day after day, he sat in front of his cardboard box repairing shoes. While he worked, he would tell stories of his life to anyone who would listen.

He worked on his right knee as he sat on a small stool while his dog lay beside him. He was very good at repairing shoes, so many people came to the shoemaker to have

their shoes fixed, but most of all, people loved to hear him tell stories of when he was a young boy living on the farm with his family.

While he worked, he would hum songs or whistle. He enjoyed his work very much. When someone would walk by, he would begin a conversation. Most people would stop and only chat with him for a short time, but sometimes they would sit and talk with him for hours. He was a wise old man, and there wasn't anything he would not talk about.

On my way to school, I liked to stop and talk to him. He was always very busy repairing a pair of shoes, but he still took the time to talk to me.

One day, I heard a new sound coming from the cardboard box. It was beautiful music. At first, I thought it was a radio playing the music, but when I got close to his box, I realized it was the shoemaker, and he was playing a violin. He was playing it so gently and sweetly that the entire place filled with joy.

Other people began to come to listen to the music the old shoemaker played.

He played and played. He played familiar songs as well as songs I had never heard before. The people, who were listening, were silent.

When he finished, the people clapped and asked for more. He bowed at the waist and played again. It was dark when he finally said good-bye and disappeared into his small cardboard box.

Everyone in the town began to talk about the music from the old man. No one remembered hearing music being played like that before.

The next day I asked him where he had gotten the violin he was playing. He told me that he had traded for it. He had repaired an old pair of shoes for a lady in the city, and then she gave it to him.

He said it was not a very good violin, but it was nice to play again.

I asked him where he learned to play so well.

He told me he had played all his life, but when the war came, his violin had been destroyed. He did not have enough money to buy another one, but even though the old violin was not great, he would now be able to make music anytime he wanted. He had a

big smile on his face.

Many of the people in our town decided to collect money to buy him a new violin. Everyone became excited about the idea. I was happy to give some money to help to buy him the new violin.

Every day, after he finished his work, the old man played his old violin and filled the street with soft gentle music. More and more people came to hear him play.

When there was enough money collected, the leader of our village went to the city and purchased a brand-new violin.

They planned to ask the old shoemaker to come to the park to play for the town, and then they would surprise him by giving him his new violin.

On the day he was to receive the violin, a young boy was sent to ask the old man to come to the park to play for everyone. Usually, the old man only stayed close to his cardboard box. He did not like to go to other places very often. So, it was thought he might not want to come.

A long time passed when the young boy came back alone. He told us something was wrong. The old man would not wake up.

The leaders of the town went quickly to his cardboard house to see why the old man had not come to the park.

When they returned, they told us the old man had passed away, probably in his sleep the night before. Everyone began to cry.

The leaders of our village made the place where the old man had lived in his cardboard box into a special memorial. They left everything the way he had lived. His wooden shoebox, his violin, his bed, and everything else he had, were left just the way they were when he died.

My parents said that I could keep the dog. I named it Young Woo after his old master. It lived with me until it died. It was the best friend I ever had.

**VOCABULARY:** (*Match the word to its definition*)

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|----------------------|--|
| 1. interesting _____ | a. makes to feel better, happy               |
| 2. destroyed _____   | b. remembrance, in memory of something       |
| 3. violin _____      | c. entertaining, intriguing, enjoyable       |
| 4. cheer up _____    | d. person who makes or repairs shoes         |
| 5. cardboard _____   | e. damaged, ruined                           |
| 6. hum _____         | f. completely, totally, entirely             |
| 7. shoemaker _____   | g. to die                                    |
| 8. absolutely _____  | h. sing with the mouth closed                |
| 9. pass away _____   | i. musical instrument with strings and a bow |
| 10. memorial _____   | j. paper used for boxes                      |

**TRUE / FALSE:**

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|---|-------|
| 1. The old man lived in the big city.                             | T / F |
| 2. I talked to the old man on my way to school.                   | T / F |
| 3. The old man talked to everyone.                                | T / F |
| 4. The old man had a dog.   | T / F |
| 5. People would have their shoes fixed by the old man.            | T / F |
| 6. It was wintertime and there was snow on the ground.            | T / F |
| 7. The old man lived in a big house.                              | T / F |
| 8. I liked the sound of the old man's cello.                      | T / F |
| 9. The people of the town purchased a new violin for the old man. | T / F |
| 10. The old man died in his sleep.                                | T / F |

**MULTIPLE CHOICE:**

1. Where did the old man live? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) cardboard box
  - b) shack
  - c) shanty
  - d) all the above
  
2. What instrument did the old man play? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) violin
  - b) trumpet
  - c) drums
  - d) flute
  
3. Who told the people the old man would not wake up? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) his dog
  - b) me
  - c) a young boy
  - d) the leader of the village
  
4. What happened to the cardboard box after the old man died? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) it was destroyed
  - b) it was turned into a memorial
  - c) it blew away in a storm
  - d) there was a fire

**COMPREHENSION:** *(Write a complete sentence to answer the question.)*

1. What had just ended when I first met the interesting old man?

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2. Where did the old man find the things he used to build his house?

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3. What did the old man have inside of his wooden shoebox?

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4. What did he sit on while he repaired shoes?

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5. What instrument did the old man play that made the people happy?

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6. What happened to the violin the old man had owned before the war?

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7. What did the people of the village collect money for?

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8. Who went to bring the old man to the park?

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9. What happened to the old man?

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10. What did the people do to the cardboard box after the old man died?

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