



Source: Abraham Rabinovich, 'A day of snubs for Olmert', *The Australian online*, 09/11/07.

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The parents of the recipients were gathered at the back, a hall full of fidgeting students as a barrier between, listening to the headmaster cranking through a list of school achievements.

And then out trooped the chamber quartet to play a piece by Handel, something that seemed to go too fast. The cellist had been barred from using her T, so she spent more energy holding back the slipping cello than on her playing, forcing the first violin to direct the piece in step with the cellist's battle instead of the score before them.

That was only one insult. Another came when the prizes were presented. One student after another filed past and was handed a book with barely a pause in the conveyor belt mechanics of the procedure. That part was over and done with in ten minutes. How sad for a school to portray its winners as factory fodder, the violinist among them. None was required to shake the headmaster's hand, nor even offer a smile.

To receive the prize wasn't the most important event of that day for the young violinist. She had been spotted playing and collecting her prize. Her name had been announced. Later at home, she received a call to ask if she would play for a friend of a friend the next evening. Her father had handed her the phone, so he was aware of the caller and the situation. She turned to enquire whether it was right to accept.

They arrived early. It was a big house, not that far from theirs, though she had never been down that particular road before. The gates opened as they approached, as if someone was watching and waiting to release the lock seconds before they touched it. The violinist became jumpy. Her parents laughed. It might have seemed like a scene from a film, but they knew it was probably an assistant who had seen them on a CCTV camera.

She hadn't recognized the man who welcomed them but he knew her parents. They greeted each other with warm embraces and commented on meeting again after so many years.

'So, you will play for us tonight?' he asked.

The violinist smiled. She had agreed, but wasn't exactly sure what was expected of her.

'Not now, of course,' he said, seeing the trepidation in her eyes. 'Let's eat first.'

It hadn't taken her long to realize the owner was an artist. And his work evidently sold well. But he wasn't a painter, even though paintings were in abundance. Those were all created by different hands. The owner made videos, or created installations that included videos.

She still did not understand why she was there. Her parents were old friends, but why was she invited to play? Were others due?

She had been learning Monti's Czardas recently, enjoying

the dexterity required to bring it to life. Her teacher had challenged her with this piece for just such a reason. She knew she would rise to it. Her teacher had been right.

She should have played an earlier piece that she had mastered for an earlier exam, like a Wieniawski, another flashy piece, with its harmonics, by the precocious virtuoso who had been barely older than she when he wrote it some hundred and fifty years ago. But she would rather play what was holding her attention at the moment, even if she would probably fluff it somewhere down the line. She always tackled works-in-progress when asked to play for visiting family members. Always courted disaster. She was only really keen to play for her grandma, for she had an interest in her playing. The others didn't seem that bothered.

She played without apparent mistakes, though she knew where she had gone wrong. No one else perceived. They had enjoyed her rendition, the audience of three. The artist told her he was astounded by her ability and that he was honoured she had played for them. She believed him. Then he explained why he had wanted her to play. He had a daughter too. But she had died suddenly, in a car crash. She had played violin. He wanted to offer his help if she needed it. He had the money. Learning to play was expensive. What did she need? A new violin? Extra tuition? Anything? What did she need?

The young violinist assured him that all was well. That she was happy with her violin. It wasn't a Strad or anything like that, but she didn't need one of those. Not yet. Not ever, she hazarded. She was content.

The artist said that if she changed her mind or thought of something else then she was to contact him.

She already knew what she wanted, but it was bigger than her and her violin. She couldn't tell him what it was. What could he do about it anyway?

A while later her parents received an invitation to the artist's exhibition. She went with them. The show was an installation. It exuded a peace and tranquillity as she walked from one room to another, watched videos projected onto canvas covered walls, and moved around objects placed in the dimmed light.

When the young violinist emerged she was greeted by the artist. He asked if she enjoyed the show?

'I need to tell you something,' she replied.

'You've thought about what I said before?'

'Yes.'

'Tell me.'

'I would like to bring my violin and play in the gallery surrounded by your work.'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Paul Buck.*